



THE FLYER

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December 1992

Williamsburg Bird Club

Brian Taber, Editor (253-1181)

December Events

Meeting

There will not be a Club Meeting during December. Instead please try to participate in the bird count, which will be held for our club on December 20th, 1992. (See article on page 2)

November Field Trip

Tom Armour led the group consisting of Marilyn Zeigler, Sue Gray Al-Salam, Mary West, Emily Sharrett, Dorthy Whitfield And Martha Briggs to Hog Island on the 21st. Among the highlights were 10 Great Egrets, a Glossy Ibis, 16 Tundra Swans, 3 Bald Eagles, 2 Northern Harriers, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, 20 Greater Yellowlegs, 6 Dunlin, 50 Bonaparte's Gulls and 25 Green-winged Teal.

Can Someone Help?

Is there a generous host who would provide an out-of-town Bird Club speaker with bed and breakfast for the January 20th meeting? Please call Marilyn Zeigler at 220-2536

Coming Attractions

December 20th — Williamsburg Bird Club Annual Winter Bird Count

January 20th—First club meeting in 1993.

May 14-16th, 1993, VSO Annual Meeting, hosted in Norton, Va. by the Cumberland Nature Club. The banquet speaker will be Ted Eubanks, who runs the Piping Plover Project on the Texas and Mexican Gulf Coast.

Out With the Old, In With the New

Congratulations and thank you to our outgoing officers and board members: Dick Mahone, Marilyn Zeigler, Joy Archer, Brian Taber, Fred Blystone, Phyllis Johnson and Emily Sharrett.

Good luck to the 1993 leaders: Ruth Beck, president; Marilyn Zeigler, vice-president for programs; Bill Sheehan, Vice-president for the newsletter; Fred Blystone, treasurer, Alice Springe, secretary, and Bill Davies and David Schuster, at-large board members.

Please let the officers know of your ideas to make our great club even better!

Welcome to our newest member

Floyd P. Carmines
2188 Lake Powell Road
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
229-0622



Christmas Count-December 20th

Lee Schuster has agreed to coordinate the count next year and will assist Brian Taber this time to learn the procedure.

The areas that will be surveyed, along with some of the landmark locations are:

1. **Cheatham Annex**—Camp Peary, Queen's Lake, Cheatham Annex, Felgate's Creek, Indian Field Creek.
2. **Kingsmill**—Country Road to Carter's Grove, Kingsmill, Williamsburg Airport, Parkway from CW Information Center to just before College Creek.
3. **Hog Island**—Ferry ride over and Hog Island Refuge.
4. **Jamestown**—Parkway from College Creek to Jamestown and Jamestown Island.
5. **College Woods**—College Woods and campus of W&M, Lake Matoaka, Lake Powell, College Landing Park on South Henry Street, Population Lab, Hickory Signpost Road and Treasure Island Road.
6. **Middle Plantation**—Mid-County Road, Waller Mill Park (both entrances), Drummond's Field, News Road and First Colony.
7. **Jolly Pond**—Jolly Pond, Cranston's Mill Pond, Little Creek Reservoir.
8. **Skimino**—Barlow's Pond, Skimino Farms, Mirror Lakes, entrance to York River State Park and Riverview Plantation.

Please call Brian Taber at 253-1181 for further information about the count and the tally.

This year marks the 93rd anniversary since 27 conservationists decided to protest the traditional bird shoot, and instead of shooting birds, they counted them on Christmas Day 1900. The event originated as a protest to the traditional holiday 'side hunt' in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and animals in one day.

Today, volunteers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South American, Bermuda and the West Indies will count and record every individual bird and bird species encountered during one calendar day. More than 1600 individual Christmas Bird Counts will be held during a two and a half week period.

Each count group has a designated circle 15 miles in diameter—about 177 square miles—where they try to cover as much ground as possible within a 24-hour period. The data collected by each count group is then sent into National Audubon Society headquarters in New York. Count data is published on a special book-sized edition of *American Birds* magazine.

Apart from its attraction as a social, sporting, and competitive event, the annual count reveals interesting and scientifically useful information on the early-winter distribution patterns of various bird species and overall health of the environment.



From the newsletter of the International Crane Foundation

Volunteers Make Proud Parents

By Susan McDonald

It was a small white notecard taped in the window of the bird seed store: "Chick Parents Wanted." I was curious, so I applied. I had no idea what I was getting into. Although I had never been to the International Crane Foundation (ICF) before, I would have laughed if I had seen the "chick parents" running about with crane puppets, purring and 'whooping' to little fuzzball chicks.

I got the job. I learned that chick parents are responsible for keeping a germ-free atmosphere for these little superstars, for tracking their physical well-being, for noting their food and water intake, and for recording its release out the other end. Chick parents are also required to answer questions from the public, make sure chicks exercise, and prevent fights among the chicks. Preventing fights was like trying to hold 30 corks under water at the same time. In nature cranes may hatch two chicks a year, but in some species, usually only one survives. Vying for mom and dad's undivided attention is deadly business for a crane, but the aviculture staff preferred we keep them all alive on our watch.

The cranes began to steal my heart the more I learned about their individual personalities. I knew I had made a complete trans-

formation from nervous volunteer to real chick parent the day my first chick flew. The ICF staff had told me to run into the wind and flap my wings for the chicks to imitate. This we tediously did for weeks, much to the amusement of the visitors. But one hot gusty day in early August, as I ran into the wind flapping my wings for the 435th time that afternoon, one of the chicks, a beautiful gray Sandhill crane named Dakota, lifted off behind me. He flapped his long powerful wings over my shoulders so close that he grazed my ear. Higher and higher he flew, free of gravity, free of the aggression of his chick-yard siblings, free of care. Like any good parent watching her young succeed, I was so proud.

The hours of raking the pens, scrubbing the bowls and refilling them with water—all were suddenly worthwhile. Just like the human parent who forgets sleepless nights and backseat bickering while watching a child accept his high school diploma, I was transformed by pride as this one accepts his diploma in the sky.

But these babies weren't going on to college or even into the family business of migrating to the winter territory. They were destined to have their wings clipped and to stay living in captivity, albeit comfortably and with excellent medical benefits, in order to breed future generations. Their children might be released into the wild if safe habitat can be found. My chicks are literally the hope of their generation. How many other parents can say that?

There's a different volunteer every morning and every afternoon. We are all ages, men and women. There's a financial secretary, a schoolteacher, a retired gentleman, a farm wife, a nurse, a doctor.

That summer of 1991, we were trusted with the care of almost four percent of the world's population of Whooping Cranes. They trusted us. We taught them to fly. I'll always remember sweet Chip, aggressive Baratux, silly Kane. May their children fly free over our heads soon.



Bird of the Season

Horned Grebe

Podiceps auritus

There is a small bird that comes to the salty and brackish waters of our area each fall, but you may never see it fly. It swims well on the surface and dives expertly, beginning with a short, upward leap, but the Horned Grebe, like other grebes, is so attached to the water that it is rarely seen on the wing.

At 12-15 inches, it is about the size of a Green-winged or Blue-winged Teal. The winter plumage, which we usually see, is grayish above and whitish on the cheeks and below, with a black cap. There appears to be no tail or wings, just a compact body and a rather long neck. The eye is brilliant red.

Horned Grebes can be found most regularly in our area on the York River, especially between Felgate's Creek and Yorktown, along the Colonial Parkway. They may be quite close to shore and often allow an observer a long look. They are frequently solitary, but also may occur in small groups. They mix with rafts of other driving waterfowl, such as Canvasbacks and Ruddy Ducks.

The spectacular breeding plumage may be seen on lingering individuals in April or May. The gray and white bird is then transformed into a rufous and black bird with showy golden ear tufts which stretch from the eye to the back of the head. A small, cowlick-like crest may be seen in any plumage.

The breeding grounds are far to the west and north, mostly in Canada and Alaska, on shallow ponds and sloughs. Horned Grebes winter along both coasts, in search of a wide variety of seafood.

Project FeederWatch

While enjoying watching birds at your feeder this winter, you can contribute to scientific knowledge by registering for Project FeederWatch. Sponsored by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the Long Point Bird Observatory, this program provides data for scientists who track changes in resident songbird populations.

During the 1989-90 winter season, feederwatchers also recorded the number of birds killed in window collisions at their homes. Nine percent of all watchers report one or more such incidents. Sixty-six different species were involved. To prevent such accidents, it is recommended that black plastic garden protection netting be mounted on frames installed about a foot away from offending windows. Frequently, windows near bird feeders are prime culprits.

The most common winter feeder visitors are Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, American Goldfinches and Dark-eyed Juncos. To register for the 1992-93 feederwatch, send \$12.00 to:

Project FeederWatch
Cornell Lab of Ornithology
159 Sapsucker Woods Road
Ithaca, NY 14850

From the Virginia Wildlife Federation Record
January 1992

Binoculars, Anyone?

If anyone knows of any used Zeiss binoculars for sale, please call Brain Taber at 253-1181.



Birds From Around the Area

On 11/19, Tom Armour found 2 Clapper Rails at College Creek, 120 Forster's Terns at Kingsmill Marina, a Sharp-shinned Hawk at his feeder and 2 Pied-billed Grebes, a Bufflehead and a Cooper's Hawk at Kingsmill Pond. The day before, at Kingsmill, Tom had watched as a Red-tailed Hawk dined on a squirrel. On the 24th, Tom saw a male Purple Finch at Bill Sheehan's feeder. He found 2 Brown Pelicans at the marina on the 28th and 3 there on the 29th. On the 30th he added 2 Common Loons and 2 Common Mergansers on the James near Kingsmill.

Bill Snyder reports 2 Pied-billed Grebes on Lake Matoaka on the 12th and 3 Mute Swans there on the 15th; Lucille Thornley found a late Blue-gray Gnatcatcher on the 22nd at her Mill Neck Road yard; Ruth Beck reports 5 Brown Creepers from her Barhamsville property on the 23rd; Julie Hotchkiss watched 200 Canada Geese and 2 Snow Geese near First Colony on the 25th.

Bill Sheehan reports a Pine Warbler at his feeder on 12/1, the first feeder warbler of this season. He has also recently seeing both kinglets there, Brown Creepers, Hermit Thrushes almost daily, and Sharp-shinned Hawks checking the feeder regularly.

Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour toured Surry County and Hog Island on the 13th, where they found Rusty Blackbirds, Snow Geese, Shovelers,

Hooded Mergansers, a Northern Harrier, 2 Bald Eagles and a Tree Swallow.

On the 8th, 7 Red-tailed Hawks were seen migrating very high over Mill Creek, near Jamestown, in a one-hour period; 10 loons passed over the same area in 30 minutes on the 15th; a Fox Sparrow was there on the 18th.

On the 27th, 9 Brown Pelicans were on the York River, between Felgate's Creek and Yorktown; 14 were there on the 29th; Northern Gannets were present both days at the Yorktown waterfront.





Red-cockaded Woodpecker

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker is certainly a bird of a different feather. Though many birds raise their young as a couple, the red-cockaded chooses a cooperative family style for raising young, soliciting the help of younger birds and unmated males. Family groups can range from 6 to 8 individuals and be as large as 15 individuals. Everyone in the family helps with protecting their territory as well as feeding the young. These family groups are more productive than a single mated pair, showing an apparent advantage for the family life style.

Why has this type of cooperative breeding evolved? For many years it was thought that this was a selfless effort on the part of the cooperators to perpetuate the species. However, as more studies were conducted it was found that cooperative breeding is an indication of environmental constraints. As optimum habitat is lost or utilized the opportunities for younger birds to breed become limited. Also, a shortage of sexual partners or availability of other resources may force family groups to evolve.

In Virginia we're down to our last 4 sites with 11 adults spread among these sites. This year they raised a total of 5 young at three of the sites. Not a very good return for a family effort that should produced two to five young per site. So what's going on here? In Virginia, the red-cockaded appears to be stressed by the lack of suitable habitat, specifically open mature pine forest. With competition between the lumber industry and the development of southeastern Virginia little room has been left for this bird.

Identified as a federally endangered

species, the Red-cockaded woodpecker has received protection status since 1970. Despite this status, timber practices throughout the southeast discourage the development of mature pine stands. Conservation efforts are constrained because a large portion of remaining habitat is on private land.

In addition to competition with man, the Red-cockaded Woodpecker faces other obstacles. A natural competitor for cavity space is the red-cockaded's cousin, the Pileated Woodpecker. A pileated will move in and push out its smaller cousin, forcing the red-cockaded to move elsewhere.

Cavity restrictors have been successfully used to discourage the pileated takeover of red-cockaded cavities. The restrictors, pieces of metal placed around the cavity, limit the size of the cavity opening forcing the larger pileateds to look elsewhere.

While these management efforts help, they are not a cure for the problem, loss of habitat. If we are to maintain the Red-cockaded Woodpecker in Virginia, then we will have to make the commitment to protect the habitat necessary to the survival of this species.

(From Volume 1, Number 1 of Nongame News, Newsletter of the Va. Department of Game & Inland Fisheries Nongame & Endangered Species Program)
