



THE FLYER

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November 1992

Williamsburg Bird Club

Brian Taber, Editor (253-1181)

November Events

Meeting

Wednesday, **November 18th**,
7:30 p.m., in Room 117,
Millington Hall on the Wil-
liam and Mary campus.

Program

Bill Akers, a long-time club member, who received his Master's degree in Biology from W&M, will present: *A Kenyan Adventure, Or Did I Really Eat That Zebra?* Bill will use his usual vast experience and special wit to provide a very entertaining evening.

Field Trip

The November field trip will be lead by Tom Armour on **November 21st to Hog Island**. Those going should meet at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center parking lot at 8:00 to catch the 8:30 ferry. Waterfowl should be numerous by then and mosquitoes should be on the decline. Dress in layers to be prepared for any weather condition.

Important

At the November meeting we will vote on club officers for 1993 (see proposed slate on page 6). There will also be a discussion and vote on raising the dues.

Coming Attractions

There will not be a club meeting during December.

December 4-6th, Back Bay Field Trip

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.

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome the newest members of the Williamsburg Bird Club.

Marilyn Lewis
1504 Conway Dr., Apt. 102
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
220-4750

Would also like to welcome back from Japan.

Mandy Marvin
208 Owaissa Court, S.E.
Vienna, Va. 22180-5928
(703) 255-3249



The Silence Of the Birds

From the article "Why American Songbirds Are Vanishing", by John Terborgh, in *Scientific American* (May 1992)

The trills and calls of thrushes, warblers, tanagers, and other favorite American songbirds are heard less frequently in many cities and suburbs. A decline of the songbird population has been under way for decades. By the 1970s, for example, the number of breeding birds in Rock Creek Park, in Washington, D.C., was only about one-third what it was in the 1940s, and species that bred there but wintered in the tropics had fallen off by almost 90 percent. Similar declines were reported elsewhere in the country, with the most marked losses appearing east of the Mississippi.

Why have seemingly friendly environments such as Rock Creek Park become hostile to songbirds? The answer, which took years to discover, has two parts, according to Duke University environment scientist John Terborgh. First, the songbirds' city and suburban habitats are also friendly to their predators. Raids on bird nests by Blue Jays, raccoons, and opossums have increased along with the predator's population. In an experiment to gauge the impact, Princeton's David S. Wilcove stocked artificial nests with quail eggs and set them out in rural and suburban woodlots, and at a "control" site in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In the Smokies, only one "nest" in 50 was raided, whereas in the suburban and rural

woodlots the rate was, in some cases, 100 percent.

But predators are not the songbirds' only foe. Parasitic birds, especially the Brown-headed Cowbird, are another. They lay their eggs in the nests of other species, which often raise the resulting offspring as their own. Because the parasite's eggs typically hatch sooner than the host's, the hatchling parasite has a head start over its nest mates and is able to grab much of the food. Often, the host's own offspring starve. Researchers Margaret C. Brittingham and Stanley A. Temple of the University of Wisconsin found that nearly two-thirds of the nests on the edges of forest in southern Wisconsin had cowbirds' eggs in them.

Further studies in several states, Terborgh says, have confirmed that such predators and parasites are largely responsible for the song birds plight. The long-distance tropical migrants, such as orioles, warblers, and thrushes, are most vulnerable.

Alas, the decline of the songbirds in settled areas seem bound to continue, Terborgh concludes. To save the birds and their music, he writes, it will be necessary to consolidate and expand their safe havens in areas such as the Smokies, the Adirondacks, and the north woods of Minnesota and Maine.



Bird of the Season

LeConte's Sparrow
Ammordramus leconteii

Bill Williams was walking Drummond's Field on October 19th, looking at the large and varied assortment of sparrows there, when he found a bird that had not been recorded for our local area. It was a LeConte's Sparrow, arguably the most beautiful sparrow in North America.

LeConte's is a bird of tall marsh grass in the prairies of Canada and the northern plains of the United States in the summer. In the winter, it prefers wet or dry fields with dense, matted, grassy vegetation. It's often described as secretive, preferring to run away, rather than fly, but it may sit cooperatively in plain view for long periods. I was lucky to see it, three days later, with a Richmond birder who had a world class spotting scope, so we saw the bird from only 20 feet away, at about 45 power magnification and were able to study the bird for about 10 minutes. It was an incredible view!

The bird's field marks are many and varied. The most obvious feature is the orangish eyeline. There is also a gray-blue ear patch, a white central crown stripe, an orangish breast and dark streaks on the sides of the breast and flanks. If that isn't enough, the nape appears grayish or pinkish or purplish, with chestnut streaks. If that still isn't enough, the back is boldly streaked with dark and light markings.

The call note is rather weak and it separated the bird from the sounds of the Savannah and Song and Swamp sparrows that occupy the same habitat.

It's possible that the bird could winter here and local birders will surely check to see if it does.

Birds from Around the Area

Small brownish members of the finch family were in excellent supply at Drummonds Field, near Jamestown, as discovered by Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour on October 28th. Seen then and during the following several days were Vesper Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Song Sparrow and LeConte's Sparrow, as well as House Finch, American Goldfinch and Pine Siskin.

Julie Hotchkiss found a Red-breasted Nuthatch at First Colony on October 7th and Ty Hotchkiss found a Sharp-shinned Hawk there on the 27th.

Bill Snyder saw an American Coot, Wood Ducks, Black Ducks and Tree Swallow near Jamestown Island on October 15th and a Great Egret there on the 25th.

Bill Sheehan's yard hosted a Wood Thrush and Yellow-billed Cuckoo on October 10th, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak on the 11th, Solitary Vireos and Golden-crowned Kinglets on the 16th, White-throated Sparrows, a Yellow-billed Sapsucker and a Red-breasted Nuthatch on the 18th, a Brown Creeper on the 23rd, Dark-eyed Juncos on the 26th and a Catbird and a Red-shouldered Hawk on the 27th.

Marilyn Zeigler studied a Swainson's Thrush at close range on October 12th at Queen's Lake.

Highway Pickup

Bill Davies

On October 17th, we had another great team of 11 people working. Fred Blystone, Louise Menges, Dick Mahone, Dorothy Whitfield, Joy Archer, Martha & Bob Burgess, & "Newcomers" Jim Booth, Ellen McLean and Amanda Allen (+ myself). Results: 104 pounds of Glass recycled, 14.3 pounds of aluminum and 10 bags of miscellaneous trash.



Saving Migratory Birds

A Project for the Backyard Conservation-
ist

By Jamie K. Doyle
Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center
and Craig Tufts
National Wildlife Federation

Shelter

Establishing shelter for migratory birds is an easy but vital task:

- * Shrubs and evergreen trees provide good cover.
- * Use landscaping "scraps" to create a thick brush pile of branches or a meandering rock wall.
- * Provide several sources of cover dispersed throughout the entire yard.

Food

Providing the variety of food resources that birds require is the most fun and challenging aspect of landscaping for migrants:

- * Provide a wide variety of fruiting and flowering plants.
- * Flowers and fruits should be available to migrants upon their arrival in early spring, through their departure in late fall.
- * Many plants attract an array of insects upon which migrants feed. Oaks, hickories, and maples provide a constant supply of insects for an avian feast.

Go Native!

Grow native species whenever possible; they are best adapted to local soils and climates, require less fertilizer, water, and pest control. Native

plants also offer the best overall food sources for birds. Moreover, the dispersal of their seeds by avian foragers will help in insure a healthy forest community in future years.

Think Variety!

Maximize your property's resources by choosing native plants that vary in structure, type of food produced, and the times at which that food is available. To ensure that these plants are suited for your property, have your soil tested (even over a small area the soil's pH may range widely). Consult a gardening book or your local cooperative extension office for assistance.

Hummingbirds—don't sell them short!

Q. I have several hummingbird feeders in my yard already. Do I still need flowering plants?

A: Most definitely.

Traditionally, hummingbird lovers have relied on feeders alone, but they offer only one source of nourishment. Hummingbirds also need pollen and insects for protein. Flowering plants offer hummingbirds not only food resources, but shelter and nesting sites as well. To attract hummingbirds and encourage them to stay, concentrate on landscaping with numerous plant species that flower from early spring until late fall.

To ensure the health and safety of hummingbirds at supplemental feeders, remember:

- * The sugar-water solutions should never be stronger than four parts water to one part sugar. Boil the mixture briefly to fully dissolve the sugar and kill bacteria.
 - * Clean and refill the feeder at least once a week (every few days in hot weather). Use
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white vinegar to scrub away mold and algae.

* Never put the feeder in direct sunlight.

* Honey causes a potentially fatal fungus to grow on the tongues of hummingbirds, so don't substitute for sugar.

Nesting Habitat

If you happen to own large tracts of forest land, learn how to properly protect them from degradation, so as to provide adequate nesting habitat for migrants.

In addition to reference books on the subject, your local county extension office, your state non-game wildlife program, and the U.S. Forest Service's Stewardship Program can provide expert advice.

Owls Do Bathe

By Julie Hotchkiss

Grand Teton National Park, in Wyoming, is famous for its spectacular mountains, and we have returned to this beautiful spot many times. However, this past summer we found a new attraction. A Great Horned Owl had taken up residence at our friend's place near Teton Village. The owl had probably nested here earlier, and it remained tolerant of our friends when they arrived in July. No doubt the owl considered us the intruders, but it was oblivious to most of our activities as long as we didn't get too close.

The owl often perched by the creek in a favorite tree overlooking the water, and it would remain there for

hours. It was certainly a good spot to stay cool, but we also wondered if it might be fishing. We have seen one catch a fish on the James River, and there are other records of this. We never did see it with a fish, but we watched it hunting several times.

One day we noticed the owl staring intently across the creek. Suddenly, it flew off its favorite branch, swooped across the water on silent wings, and pounced into the tall grass with talons outstretched. The vegetation was too thick to see what happened, but it obviously caught something—probably a small mouse or vole. It stayed on the ground for several minutes as it reached down into the grass to tear apart whatever it was holding in its talons. Eventually the meal was consumed, and it flew to a tree further down the creek. It was apparent that this was a good place to eat as well as cool off.

One day we also discovered the owl liked to bathe in the creek. Our friends saw it fly in from the woods and land on the stones along the bank. It then walked into the water until it was nearly afloat. After looking up and down the creek very carefully, it put its head into the water and swished its face from side to side. After that it proceeded to dip its wings and bottom. Finally, it did a barrel roll from side to side with its whole body. It went through this procedure about three times and then walked back onto the stones. It shook its feathers, and flew off down the creek. The owl looked so much like the rocks that it would be easy to miss it unless you saw it fly in. There has been much speculation about owls bathing, but this Great Horned Owl seemed to take great pleasure in it—and didn't mind observers.



Proposed Slate — 1993 Club Officers

During October, and in accordance with the Constitution and By-Laws of the Club, the Executive Board designated three members in good standing to serve as a Nominating Committee for Club officers and at-large Board Members for 1993. The Committee consisted of: Tom Armour, Ruth Beck and Fred Blystone.

The Nominating Committee hereby recommends the following slate to the membership for consideration and voting at the November meeting. Prior to voting, floor nominations will be invited for any or all offices.

1993 Slate

President	Ruth Beck
1st Vice President/Programs	Marilyn Zeigler
2nd Vice President/Flyer Editor	Bill Sheehan
Treasurer	Fred Blystone
Secretary	Alice Springe
At-Large Members	Bill Davies David Schuster

Information Numbers

Anyone who wants information about birds seen throughout Virginia and nearby areas, including rare birds seen, should call either the Voice of the Naturalist at (301) 652-1088 in Washington D. C. or the Virginia Birdline at 929-1736 near Lynchburg. These are excellent sources of important and interesting news.

Christmas Count

We still need someone to accept the responsibility of coordinating our Annual Christmas Count. I will assist the person this year, if necessary, in the hope that he or she will continue for 2 or 3 years. It really is fun and not difficult, but we need lots of people to accept such small jobs so that the Club can spread out our many activities over a large number of people.

If you are interested in a very worthwhile assignment, please call me any evening, but call soon! I'll be waiting by the phone!

The newsletter editor will certainly appreciate all manner of calls and submissions of information for the newsletter. Please call Brian weeknights between 6 pm and 10 pm at **253-1181** or send articles, local bird sightings, information about birds seen on vacations and such to **104 Druid Court, Williamsburg, Va. 23185**. This will insure that our newsletter is a reflection of the membership. If you're not sure about what to send, please call. Thank you!