



THE FLYER

Volume 16, No. 1

January 1992

Williamsburg Bird Club

Brian Taber Editor (253-1181)

December Events

Meeting Wednesday, **January 15th**, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117, Millington Hall, at the College.

Program Tom Armour will give us portraits of and commentary on rarer birds of the Williamsburg area. Tom, our just-retired president, has a state-wide reputation as a bird photographer and his slide shows are always a treat.

Field Trip The January field trip will be on **Sunday, January 19th to Hog Island**. We will want to catch the 8:30 am ferry—so mark your calendars to meet at **8:00 am** at the usual place (Colonial Williamsburg Information Center Parking Lot—right hand side). Tom Armour will be the trip leader.

Important!

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

Coming Attractions

Our program for February 19th has not been finalized yet, but will be announced at the January meeting and also in the next FLYER.

Would you like to see a Short-eared Owl? The **Hampton Road Bird Club** will conduct a field trip to **Craney Island on January 11th**. They will meet at the YMCA parking lot (by the James River Bridge) at 7:30 am.

A well-deserved thank-you is extended to the Club officers and Board members who guided us through 1991: Tom Armour, President; Julie Hotchkiss, Vice-president for programs; Bill Sheehan, Vice-president for the newsletter; Joy Archer, Secretary; Fred Blystone, Treasurer; Bill Akers, Board member and Marilyn Zeigler, Board member.

Good luck to the 1992 leaders, Dick Mahone, President; Marilyn Zeigler, Vice-president for programs, Brian Taber, Vice-president for the newsletter, Joy Archer, who continues as Secretary; Fred Blystone, who continues as Treasurer; Phyllis Johnson, Board member and Emily Sharrett, Board member.

Please give them your support and let them know your good ideas and concerns, as this helps to make our Club even better.

Christmas Count

Our 15th Christmas Count was held on December 15th. Temperatures ranged from a cool 34 to an almost balmy, sunny 48. Winds at 10-20 miles per hour, however, created uncomfortable wind chills for those in open areas.

The stalwart contingent of counters included Carolyn Lowe, Joy Archer, Amanda Allen, Tom and Jeanne Armour, Ruth Beck, Fred Blystone, Gary Driscoll, Adrienne Frank, Grace and Joe Doyle, Bettye Fields, Ty and Julie Hotchkiss, Greg Keller, Dorothy Mitchell, Tim O'Connell, Eileen Popp, Mary Pulley, Laverne Shaffer, Dorothy Silsby, Craig Tumer, Ada Van Ness, Bill Williams, Bob Morris, Alan and Emily Sharrett, Lee and Dave Shuster, Dick Fout, Marilyn Zeigler, Bill Sheehan at his feeder, Brian Taber and Steve Rottenborn, who deserves special applause for his determination and patience in counting tens of thousands of Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds that flew over Hog Island, while he waited for Short-eared Owls that never appeared.

The counters logged 66 total party hours and covered 282 miles by foot and by car, between 5 am and 5 pm. Several counters spent time owling in the dark, finding 3 Eastern Screech-Owls, 3 Barred Owls and 15 Great Horned Owls.

The effort produced 100 species and nearly 80,000 individuals. Three more birds were seen during count week, which is 3 days before and after the count day. They were; Common Merganser, Purple Finch and Fox Sparrow.

Surprisingly, no Fish Crows, Common Snipe, American Coot or Wild Turkeys were found. Two birds, though, Barn Swallow and American Bittern, were found for the first time ever on our count.

Other highlights include Solitary Vireo, Great Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Green-backed Heron, Snow Goose, Mute Swan, Blue-winged Teal, Clapper Rail, American Woodcock and Orange-crowned Warbler.

Our count has averaged 107 species, ranging from a low of 97 in 1982 to a high of 115 in 1984.

Congratulations to all who participated in this fun and important early winter census. The information from over 1500 Christmas Counts will be published in *American Birds* magazine next fall.

(A complete summary of the count is on page 3)

Bird of the Season

Fox Sparrow ***Passerella iliaca***

When the weather turns rainy or snowy, these birds become more commonly reported at feeders and along roadsides in our area. At other times, however, these winter visitors can be quite difficult to find.

Fox Sparrows feed on the ground, kicking both feet at once, scratching among leaves, looking for seeds and small animal life. A little larger than a Hermit Thrush, it resembles a thrush with its spotted underparts and reddish tail. The beak, of course, is quite different. The gray and rufous "foxy" plumage may be very dark in north-western birds or decidedly grayish in western birds.

Fox Sparrows summer in the Rocky Mountains, Alaska and most of Canada. They winter on the Pacific coast and from Arizona across the southern states to the lower midwest and Pennsylvania. They remain in our area from late October through March. Keep a sharp eye out for these large and uncommonly beautiful sparrows.

1991 Christmas Count

LOON, Common	1
GREBE, Pied-billed	14
Horned	30
CORMORANT, Double -crested	292
BITTERN, American	1
HERON, Great Blue	79
EGRET, Great	1
HERON, Green-backed	1
NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned	5
SWAN, Tundra	168
Mute	4
GOOSE, Snow	54
GOOSE, Canada	1,163
DUCK, Wood	2
TEAL, Green-winged	282
DUCK, American Black	259
MALLARD	696
PINTAIL, Northern	106
TEAL, Blue-winged	3
SHOVELER, Northern	2
GADWALL	12
WIGEON, American	29
CANVASBACK	3,309
REDHEAD	2
DUCK, Ring-necked	547
SCAUP, Lesser	14
GOLDENEYE, Common	12
BUFFLEHEAD	196
MERGANSEr, Hooded	253
Red-breasted	2
DUCK, Ruddy	1,835
VULTURE, Black	24
Turkey	156
EAGLE, Bald	12
HARRIER, Northern	6
HAWK, Sharp-shinned	8
Cooper's	1
HAWK, Red-shouldered	6
Red-tailed	14
KESTREL, American	13
BOBWHITE, Northern	13
RAIL, Clapper	1
KILLDEER	46
WOODCOCK, American	2
GULL, Laughing	316
Bonaparte's	145
Ring-billed	1,182
Herring	222
Great Black-backed	73
TERN, Forster's	148
DOVE, Rock	88
Mourning	137
SCREECH-OWL, Eastern	3
OWL, Great Horned	15
Barred	3

KINGFISHER, Belted	26
WOODPECKER, Red-headed	4
Red-bellied	44
SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied	24
WOODPECKER, Downy	24
Hairy	4
FLICKER, Northern	64
WOODPECKER, Pileated	24
PHOEBE, Eastern	12
SWALLOW, Tree	14
Barn	1
JAY, Blue	56
CROW, American	333
CHICADEE, Carolina	109
TITMOUSE, Tufted	86
NUTHATCH, Red-breasted	4
White-breasted	29
Brown-headed	6
CREEPER, Brown	4
WREN, Carolina	94
House	2
Winter	4
Marsh	3
KINGLET, Golden-crowned	43
Ruby-crowned	54
BLUEBIRD, Eastern	149
THRUSH, Hermit	21
ROBIN, American	175
MOCKINGBIRD, NORTHERN	38
THRASHER, Brown	3
WAXWING, Cedar	526
STARLING, European	1,438
VIREO, Solitary	1
WARBLER, Orange-crowned	3
Yellow-rumped	548
Pine	6
Palm	4
CARDINAL, Northern	71
TOWHEE, Rufous-sided	48
SPARROW, Chipping	14
Field	61
Savannah	25
Song	145
Swamp	126
White-throated	207
JUNCO, Dark-eyed	309
BLACKBIRD, Red-winged	12,786
MEADOWLARK, Eastern	112
BLACKBIRD, Rusty	37
GRACKLE, Common	49,715
COWBIRD, Brown-headed	95
FINCH, House	94
SISKIN, Pine	1
GOLDFINCH, American	58
SPARROW, House	339

Some of the early winter activity in our area has included the following:

Hermit Thrush almost daily throughout December; Wood Ducks on Kingsmill Pond, December 10th and a Red-tailed Hawk at First Colony on December 11th. Also on the 11th, Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan found Common Egrets, Tundra Swans, Snow Geese, Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Ducks a Bald Eagle, Bonaparte's Gulls and Hooded Mergansers at Hog Island, to name a few.

A Barred Owl and both kinglets were at Hollybrook on December 12th; Common Mergansers and Blue-winged Teal were at Kingsmill on the 12; a Red-breasted Nuthatch was heard on the 12th at Hollybrook and one has been regular at my feeder in Druid Hills since the end of December; Bluebirds and a Brown Thrasher continue to be regular at Bill Sheehan's deck feeder, where a Red-shouldered Hawk occasionally takes suet; Cedar Waxwings have used Bill's birdbath lately as well and he has been visited by a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Pine Warbler; at Jamestown Island, 5 Fox Sparrows were found on the 17th; another Fox Sparrow was at Hollybrook on the 18th.

A Bald Eagle was found at First Colony by Ty and Julie Hotchkiss on the 23rd; on the 30th that Hotchkiss's watched a Red-shouldered Hawk devour a vole at their new feeder.

At trip to Hog Island on New Year's Eve produced for Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan 5 species of gulls, 6 species of ducks, a Bald Eagle, Canada Geese, Tundra Swans and Great Blue Herons, despite the fact that the refuge was closed due to hunting and they had to observe from outside the main gate. The normal refuge schedule resumes after January 4th.

In nearby Barhamsville, Ruth Beck reports Rusty Blackbirds, Bald Eagle and a Great Blue Heron that dived into her lake, Osprey-style, successfully landing a fish.

Tom Armour reports a Common Loon from the river at Kingsmill on January 2nd and on the 3rd, Bill Sheehan watched some yard drama as a Sharp-shinned Hawk chased a small bird into a boxwood, eventually carrying the bird off.

The following articles are from the Northern Arizona Audubon Society newsletter.

Calcium Supplements

Female birds need calcium to produce thick, protective eggshells, but they have trouble getting enough of it from a diet restricted to seeds and insects. So, during the breeding and egg-laying season, they seek out calcium supplements, foraging for bits of bone, seashells and other items rich in mineral.

Zoologists report that female Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, an endangered species in North Carolina, stash away bone fragments during the egg-laying season. This preliminary observation marks the first known instance of a bird hoarding a substance for its mineral, rather than caloric, content. By hiding their bone fragments in trees the birds can avoid a risky trip to the forest floor.

Environmental Atrocities in the Persian Gulf

As the last burning oil well was capped, the EPA reports that the smoke plume emitted 2 million metric tons of CO₂ daily (3% of emissions worldwide), the smoke remained between 1,500 and 13,000 feet, too low to cause any massive global climate change—no "nuclear winter".

But the sabotage of the Kuwaiti oil-producing facilities discharged between 6 and 8 million barrels of oil into the Persian Gulf, a spill 30 times that at Valdez. In some areas beached oil mixed with sand to form a layer of asphalt one foot thick. Salt marshes, Mangrove swamps, intertidal creeks and streams were most affected—spawning grounds for fish and shellfish, nesting grounds to flamingos and cormorants.

Important Miscellaneous Items

Here's your chance to become a Christmas Count compiler! The job entails organizing the volunteers for next December's Count and then sending in the information to Audubon.

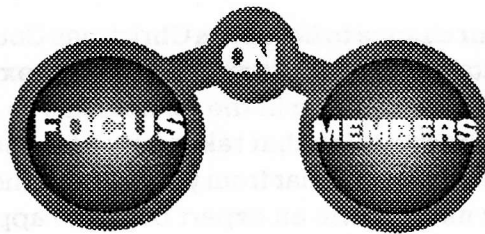
It's an important job that takes only a few hours. Most of the volunteers are regular from year to year and know what to do. You need not be an expert birder to apply!

Having lots of helpers from the club membership makes the many duties, such as this one, much easier to complete. This job is not attached to any officer's responsibility. If you think you might want to help the club with this administrative task for next year, please call Brian Taber at 253-1181 as soon as possible for further details.

From the Hampton Road Bird Club "Bird Notes" January-February 1992

The 1991 Hampton Roads Christmas Bird Count, held on 14 December, was attended by 34 people who counted 30,640 individual birds of 188 species. This was the most species found since 1985, but the total number of birds was about average. New to the count was seven Brown Pelicans off Grandview. This was not a surprise considering the influx of this species around the Hampton Roads area for the past few years. Other unusual sightings were an immature Snowy Egret in the Chesapeake Avenue section (seen on only 4 previous counts); two Snow Geese at Langley (seen on only 2 previous counts); one Harlequin Duck at Fort Monroe (seen on only one other count [1986]; and one Willet at Grandview (seen on only one other count [1977]). Nine species were counted in record numbers (previous highs and years in parentheses): Horned Grebe, 602 (474 in 1977); Northern Gannet, 90 (86 in 1986); Double-crested Cormorant, 1727 (693 in 1988); Great Blue Heron, 98 (92 in 1986); Northern Shoveler, 40 (26 in 1974); Ring-necked Duck, 237 (159 in 1989); Laughing Gull, 1365 (1186 in 1983); Great Black-backed Gull, 438 (196 in 1989); and Boat-tailed Grackle, 158 (97 in 1988). Total hours in the field were 99.75 and total miles (both foot and by car) were 501.05. Four parties listed 4 hours and 5.5 miles owling.

A male
Bluebird
the deck
ing on the
bitsput out
man be-
picture



Eastern
lands on
rail, feed-
peanut
by the
hind the
window.

Soon, several more Bluebirds follow. There are Rufous-sided Towhees, Slate-colored Juncos, Cardinals and White-throated Sparrows, scratching in the leaves beneath the dozens of azaleas, boxwoods and other plants that afford generous cover in the man's thoughtfully landscaped yard.

The man is Bill Sheehan and he has engineered his back yard to be a bonanza of food and shelter for birds. Bill began feeder-watching as a child in northern Connecticut, where he also kept watch over nesting Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. He moved to Long Island and as a teenager, became an active birder. As a member of the Queen's County Bird Club, he helped to establish a 27 acre wildlife refuge, which has since become part of sprawling JFK Airport.

In the 1930's Bill used to camp out under the lighthouse at Montauk Point, identifying both the live bird in the area and those that were killed by flying into the tower.

Bill moved to Florida and Northern Virginia, where he continued his interest in birding. He served as officer-in-charge at bird-filled Cheatham Annex from 1972-75, where he helped to establish one of the area's first Eastern Bluebird trails.

Bill has vivid memories of people coming out to see the Yellow-breasted Chat he found in January on Long Island 60 years ago. The event was written up in *Bird Lore* magazine, a predecessor of *American Birds* magazine. Bill also has fond memories of a day spent birding with Roger Tory Peterson at Jones Beach State Park.

Bill was a founding member of the Williamsburg Bird Club in 1977, was the club's first secretary and has served as its only official record keeper.

Bill is proud of the faithful Eastern Bluebirds that continually return to his feeders. He often records two dozen or more species of feeder birds. He is also one of the few people to regularly lure Red-breasted Nuthatches. Last spring, he even attracted several Rose-breasted Grosbeaks to his platform feeder. Perhaps they were on their way to Connecticut, descendants of birds Bill watched long ago.

This feature will be a regular addition to this year's newsletter, but your help is needed! Please submit to me information about any of our club's members. Include information about where they are from, how they got started in birding, favorite places, favorite birds.

Information on both experienced and new birders is needed. Please help us share information about the friends, spouses and others who make our club the great organization that is is! Be sure to get permission from the person you want to feature.

The newsletter editor will certainly appreciate all manner of calls and submissions of information for the newsletter. Please call Brain 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!