



# THE FLYER

Volume 19, Number 3

March, 1995

Williamsburg Bird Club

## Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, March 15, 1995** at 7:30 PM in Room 117, Millington Hall at William and Mary.

This month's program will be presented by Ruth Beck, and it will focus on the physical features, habits and identification of the primary owl species associated with the greater Williamsburg area. After her program, we will venture out into the nocturnal wilderness and try to strike up a conversation with some of the local Barred, Great-horned and Screech Owls around town.

## March Field Trip

Our March field trip will be held on Saturday, March 18, when we will travel to the Presquile National Wildlife Refuge located on the James River near Hopewell. Over and above the natural beauty of this island refuge with its intriguing vegetation, it is a good place to spot Bald Eagles and other raptors, as well as a variety of songbirds. Vantage points overlooking the James River may produce a glimpse of some of the remaining wintering waterfowl species in the area. An optional stop at the fish hatchery on the trip back will cap off a stimulating trip. Meet at the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor's Center at 7:15 a.m. for a prompt 7:30 departure. Bring appropriate clothing for March's variable weather, and you may also elect to bring a snack or a sack lunch since it is anticipated that this trip will last well into the afternoon.

## Combined Newsletter Next Month

The April and May newsletters will be combined next month due to the timing of the Wilson

Ornithological Society/VSO joint meeting. Your friendly editors will be busy preparing for the meeting so the May newsletter will not be written. If possible, a short mailing will go out for sightings and June events, but the April newsletter should have everything in it to get you through May.

## Schedule of WBC Events

- Mar. 18 Presquile Field Trip
- Apr. 22 Governor's Land/Jamestown Island Field Trip - Brian Taber, Leader.
- May 4 -7 Williamsburg Bird Club/Wilson Ornithological Society/Virginia Society of Ornithologists Joint Meeting
- May 20 Hog Island Field Trip - Tom Armour, Leader.
- May 28 Annual Spring Bird Count
- Jun. 24 Summer Picnic at the Beck's home.
- Aug. 17 Craney Island Field Trip - Ruth Beck, Leader.
- Sep. 23 Newport News Park Field Trip - Leader TBA.
- Oct. 21 Eastern Shore/Kiptopeke Field Trip - Emily Sharrett, Leader.
- Nov. 18 Williamsburg Winery Field Trip - Leader TBA.
- Dec. 17 Annual Christmas Bird Count.

## New Members

The Williamsburg Bird Club would like to acknowledge their newest members:

Dorothy & Maurice Kirk  
72390 Canal Street  
Lanexa, VA 23089



David & Sandra Norman  
140 Macaulay Rd.  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Craig & Pollie Que'ritel  
154 The Green  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Randy & April Coleman  
2513 Goodrich Durfey  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

## February Field Trip

Four people braved the cold and rain to venture into Cheatham Annex, and along the Yorktown side of the Colonial Parkway. Led by Bill Williams, Bettye Fields, Joy Archer, and Marilyn Zeigler bundled up to see such birds as Common Loons, Tundra Swans, American Wigeon, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Mergansers and Ruddy Ducks.

## Fisherman Island Trip

Nature provided our group of 19 with a beautiful February day on the Eastern Shore's southernmost barrier island - Fisherman Island. The temperature was right, the wind was great, and the birds made a showing. Some people watched birds and beach combed while many of us looked for that very special bird. Among the sightings were Red-throated and Common Loons, Northern Gannet, Great Cormorants, Brants, Green-winged Teal, Northern Shovelers, Oldsquaw, Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers, Northern Harrier and American Oystercatcher.

On the way home, the excitement really moved up a notch due to Bill Williams' keen observations. We stopped on the tunnel islands,

and spotted many special species. The biggest surprise was the Razorbill spotted near the rocks off the third tunnel island. It was a first for many of us, and we watched it as it slowly disappeared from our sight. Other specialties on the islands included all of the Scoters, two female Harlequin Ducks, and Purple Sandpipers. Our day totaled 39 species. We also picked up a Harbor Seal off the first island.

The people who helped make this day so great were: Shirley Devan, Laura Roland, Lois Waggoner, Andrea Hildreth, Tess Matteson, Charles Rend, Sue Gray Al-Salam, Jim Booth, Marilyn Zeigler, Brian Taber, Bill Williams, Joy Archer, Rich Gaul, Andy Carlson, John McDowell, Bill Davies, the Sugarmans from Richmond, and Lee Schuster.

A special thanks to Bill Williams and Brian Taber for their assistance on this trip.

## Renewal Reminder

Once again, a quick reminder that its time to renew your membership. Those who have not renewed as of this writing should have received a reminder with this newsletter. If you have already renewed, the club thanks you for your prompt response. If you haven't, don't feel too bad about it. The word is your newsletter editors and president are on the delinquent list as well. Dues are \$10.00 for individuals, \$15.00 for families, \$25.00 for Patron Membership, and \$3.00 for students. Send your renewals to:

Treasurer, Williamsburg Bird Club  
P.O. Box 1085  
Williamsburg, VA 23187-1085

## Field Notes for February, 1995

Can you believe it, Spring is just around the corner. On March 2, Tom Armour reported what



he thought was the first local sighting of an **Osprey** over the water near his house in Kingsmill only to have his bubble burst by John & Eleanor Hertz who saw one on February 26 over the York River near Felgate's Creek. Sorry Tom, nice spotting though; you too John and Eleanor thanks for the much needed input.

This winter has been pretty lean as far as really interesting species go, especially as compared to last year. However, early this month a rare visitor was spotted by a local Game Commissioner near the high tension lines a couple of miles before the entrance to Hog Island. Amongst a very large flock of blackbirds (you know, the kind you usually pass off as just a bunch of Starlings, Grackles or Red-winged Blackbirds), was a **Yellow-headed Blackbird**. While not unheard of as a visitor to this area, it certainly can't be considered a wintering regular. So keep your eyes open, even for what appears to be the most common of occurrences; you never know what rare visitor you might discover.

Thanks to everyone who provided sightings: Joy Archer, Tom Armour, Joe and Grace Doyle, John & Eleanor Hertz, Julie Hotchkiss, Dick Mahone, David Martin, Dave & Lee Schuster, Bill Snyder, Bill Sheehan, Alice Springle, Brian Taber, and Bill Williams.

## Jamestown Island/Colonial Parkway

Common Loon; Pied-billed Grebe; Great Egret; Wood Duck; Mallard; Wood Duck; American Black Duck; Ring-necked Duck; Common Goldeneye; Hooded Merganser; Common Merganser; Red-breasted Merganser; Black Vulture; Bald Eagle; Northern Harrier; Sharp-shinned Hawk; Cooper's Hawk; Red-tailed Hawk; American Kestrel; Clapper Rail; American Coot; Killdeer; Bonaparte's Gull; Greater Black-backed Gull; Belted Kingfisher; Red-headed Woodpecker; Yellow-bellied

Sapsucker; Hairy Woodpecker; Pileated Woodpecker; Eastern Phoebe; Brown-headed Nuthatch; Brown Creeper; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Hermit Thrush; Brown Thrasher; Cedar Waxwing; Pine Warbler; Rufous-sided Towhee; Field Sparrow; Fox Sparrow; Swamp Sparrow; Eastern Meadowlark.

## Hog Island

Tundra Swan; Mute Swan; Green-winged Teal; American Black Duck; Northern Pintail; Northern Shoveler; Common Merganser; Bald Eagle; Northern Harrier; Sharp-shinned Hawk; Red-tailed Hawk; American Kestrel; Clapper Rail; American Coot; Killdeer; Bonaparte's Gull; Great Black-backed Gull; Belted Kingfisher; Pileated Woodpecker; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Cedar Waxwing; Pine Warbler; **Common Yellowthroat**; Rufous-sided Towhee; Field Sparrow; Swamp Sparrow.

## York River

Common Loon; **Red-throated Loon**; Pied-billed Grebe; Horned Grebe; Tundra Swan; Wood Duck; American Black Duck; Ring-necked Duck; Greater Scaup; Lesser Scaup; **Surf Scoter**; Common Goldeneye; Bufflehead; Hooded Merganser; Red-breasted Merganser; Ruddy Duck; Bald Eagle; Sharp-shinned Hawk; Red-tailed Hawk; Killdeer; Great Black-backed Gull; Kingfisher; Pileated Woodpecker; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Cedar Waxwing; Pine Warbler; Rufous-sided Towhee; Chipping Sparrow.

## Camp Peary

Pied-billed Grebe; Tundra Swan; Mute Swan; Wood Duck; American Black Duck; Mallard; Gadwall; American Wigeon; Canvasback; Ring-necked Duck; Bufflehead; Hooded Merganser; Red-breasted Merganser; Ruddy Duck; Bald Eagle; Northern Harrier; Red-shouldered Hawk; Red-tailed Hawk; American Kestrel; American



Coot; Killdeer; Spotted Sandpiper; Belted Kingfisher; Red-headed Woodpecker; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Pileated Woodpecker; Eastern Phoebe; Hermit Thrush; Pine Warbler; Rufous-sided Towhee; Song Sparrow; Dark-eyed Junco; Eastern Meadowlark.

## Feeder's Yards and Miscellaneous

Pied-billed Grebe; Brown Pelican - James River at Kingsmill; Wood Duck - First Colony; Eurasian Wigeon - Barlowe's Pond; American Wigeon - Barlowe's Pond; Black Vulture; Bald Eagle; Sharp-shinned Hawk; Red-shouldered Hawk; Red-tailed Hawk; American Kestrel; American Coot - Kingsmill; Killdeer - Kingsmill; American Woodcock; Eastern Screech-owl - Banbury Cross; Great Horned Owl - Banbury Cross; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Hairy Woodpecker - Hickory Sign Post Road; Eastern Phoebe; Red-breasted Nuthatch - Canterbury Hills; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Hermit Thrush - Kingswood; Brown Thrasher; Cedar Waxwing - Williamsburg Landing; Pine Warbler; Rufous-sided Towhee; Northern Oriole - Settler's Mill; Purple Finch.

## WBC Spring Bird Listing Contest

Don't forget to sign up for the club's Spring Bird Listing Contest. Sign up by March 15 with Bill Holcombe or Ruth Beck. The contest is easy - just keep a record of all the birds you see from March 1 - May 31 within the state of Virginia. Turn in your results to Bill or Ruth by June 7. The objective of the contest is to provide an incentive to get out and bird during the spring when birds are on the move and adding color to our yards again. Besides, its fun to see if you can top last year's, or your favorite birding buddy's, tally.

## Wild Birds Unlimited Dividend

Once again, the club would like to express their gratitude to Wild Birds Unlimited for their generous donation of \$103.73 last quarter. Obviously, club members have been taking advantage of the program instituted last year in which Wild Birds Unlimited retains and distributes to the club five percent of all bird club member's purchases. If you have been shopping at the store, and haven't been using your card or letting the cashier know that you are a member of the club, please do. The proceeds of this program play an extremely important role in funding our annual research grant, and we greatly appreciate the efforts of our members and Wild Birds Unlimited in this very worthwhile endeavor.

## Birding in a Tropical Paradise

by Carolyn Lowe

(Part 3 of 3)

Our birding venture ended in the Talamanca Mountains of southeast Costa Rica at an elevation of about 7000 feet. As guests at the Chacon family's farm, we began each day's birding in the chill mountain air and concluded with a bird tally in front of a roaring fire at the lodge, followed by a dinner of fresh Rainbow trout. Long hikes through the lush mountain valley and along the rushing Savegre River added many new species: Sooty Robin, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Ruddy Treerunner, Yellow-billed Cacique, Collared Redstart, Brown-billed Scythebill, and Black-thighed Grosbeak.

Surrounded by peaks over 10,000 feet high, the valley is a world apart. Towering trees dripping with and encrusted with lichens; brilliant red bromeliads, and clusters of bright green tree orchids adding color to an otherwise muted



landscape, and meadows of soft grassy cushions that feel springy under foot. And always more birds, from Mountain Elenias and Black-capped Flycatchers to harlequin-faced Acorn Woodpeckers and graceful Long-tailed Silky Flycatchers. Both the Ruddy-capped and Black-billed Nightengale Thrushes showed up, as well as the Spotted-crowned Woodcreeper, Yellow-winged Vireo, and Flame-throated Warbler, a real burst of highland color. A diminutive Torrent Tyrannulet negotiated the river swept boulders with ease and a Flame-colored Tanager stood out against the sky.

Highland Hummingbirds are a special treat, from the very small and aptly-named Volcano to the Magnificent, largest and longest-billed hummingbird of the high mountains. Others that graced the lofty landscape as well as the numerous feeders were the Scintillant Hummingbird, Gray-tailed Mountain-gem, Green Violet-ear, and Fiery-throated Hummingbird, a highland jewel with copper-orange throat and breast, blue crown, and glossy green body.

Early one morning, eight to nine Resplendent Quetzals, males and females, gathered at their favorite spot just beyond the farm buildings and put on a spectacular show. We stood transfixed as they flew from a grove of trees, singly and at intervals, glided over an open hillside and occasionally landed in a lone tree. The male quetzal in flight, with its glittering green, crimson and white plumage and long streamers flowing, seems more imaginary than real.

In closing, I should mention that our birding list included a large number of migrants from North America, such as warblers, flycatchers, thrushes, vireos, tanagers, and raptors plus numerous shorebirds. They share habitats and foraging methods with the resident species, adding to the richness of Costa Rica's birdlife.

I left Costa Rica filled with vivid memories of the wildlife, the scenery, and the delightful people, and with a desire to return as soon as possible.

### Bird of the Month

#### Purple Sandpiper

(*Calidris maritima*)

If you have ever been to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel islands during the winter months, you may have seen a little brownish sandpiper feeding among the rocks. It's not the Ruddy Turnstone which are always found there, but the Purple Sandpiper, who likes to forage for food among the slippery, algae-coated rocks.

The Purple Sandpiper, once limited in winter to the rocky coasts of Canada and New England, now occurs much further south along the Atlantic Coast. During the breeding season, it can be found in Arctic Canada, Europe and Asia.

Both sexes are similar except that the female may be larger. The darkest sandpiper species along the Atlantic Coast, the Purple sandpiper has a mottled brown-gray back and breast in its breeding plumage. The breast is streaked. There is a whitish eyebrow and eye-ring as well as dusky ear coverts. This short-legged and plump sandpiper has a rather long, thin bill that droops slightly at the tip. The legs and base of the bill are yellow. Narrow white wing bars and trailing edge of the secondaries are visible in flight.

Winter birds have a slate-gray head, neck, and upper breast, broken by a white eye-ring, a small spot before the eye, and a whitish throat. The belly is white and the lower breast flanks and undertail coverts are streaked brown.

The Purple Sandpiper winters further north along the Atlantic than any other shorebird. It can be



found from Newfoundland and New England south to Georgia and Florida occasionally. At times, it will find its way inland. Due to the building of rock jetties along the coast, the Purple Sandpiper has increased its range.

In flight, the flock is bunched together and turns are made in unison. Their alternating dark backs and light bellies are visible in this flight pattern. They have the ability to swim, and often land among the seaweed islands on the water's surface.

When feeding, they walk along the rocky ledges and reefs. They are sure-footed over the wet, slippery rocks. Often seen flipping over seaweed and rocks, Purple Sandpipers pick crustaceans from rock crevices. They are also known to eat small shrimp, amphipods, young crabs, insects, small mollusk, algae and mosses.

The Purple Sandpiper is almost a guarantee to see on the tunnel islands this time of year. The rocks provide the perfect place for them to walk and forage. This may be a life bird for many.

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