



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 25, Number 3

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## NEXT MEETING, MARCH 21

The Williamsburg Bird Club's next meeting will be the regular third Wednesday of the month, March 21 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 Millington Hall, William & Mary campus.

Program Director Dan Cristol reports, "At this meeting William Hester of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Gloucester Office will present the results of his current research on birds in the threatened Atlantic White Cedar swamp forests of coastal Virginia and North Carolina. Mr. Hester is working with professor Atkinson and others at Christopher Newport University on a huge project to restore this vanishing habitat. As part of that project they must learn what birds are part of this once common wetland ecosystem. Those of us who have birded in the Dismal Swamp in recent years may have seen remnants of the white cedar swamps (depending on which road you went down). Maybe if we are nice to him and provide enough cookies, the speaker will agree to lead a field trip to his study sites this spring. His talk is entitled "A Comparison of Breeding Landbird Use of Atlantic White Cedar and Hardwood /Pine Forests." We're curious to find out what this unique habitat type means to the birds. What about you?

## ANOTHER GOOD TRIP TO THE BAY-BRIDGE TUNNEL ISLANDS

On February 17 Bill Williams led a group of ten to bird the four Bay-Bridge Tunnel Islands. The wind and the cold lived up to their reputation and so did the birds. Several members of the group added a life bird when a Red-necked Grebe was spotted. There were also Red-throated Loons, a

large flight of Northern Gannets, Great Cormorants in breeding plumage, a group of Brant, a large number of Red-breasted Mergansers, Long-tailed Ducks and Purple Sandpipers darting about the rocks. The usual Ruddy Turnstones were waddling about on Island One and Scoters and gulls, etc. brought the species total up to 19. The day was enjoyed by Hugh Beard and two of his students, Carolyn Lowe, Alex and Mike Minarik, Jandy and Randy Strickland and Marilyn Zeigler.

## FIELD TRIP TO THE VINEYARDS

On March 24, Randy Coleman will lead a field trip to seek out the birding residents of the Vineyards. The lake, central to the Vineyards, usually holds some Ring-necked Ducks, Mallards, Canada Geese plus two or three passers-by. Late in February there were American Widgeon and Black Ducks in the group. And from time to time Redheads are reported. Song-birds may include Cedar Waxwings, Hermit Thrushes, Towhees, Kinglets, perhaps some early migrants and a variety of sparrows. Kestrel, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks are not rare.

The group will gather at the Vineyard's club house at 7:30. You reach the club house by taking Lake Powell Road to the entrance to the Vineyards. (Note that it is the *second* entrance and that the first you come to leads to The Winery.) Follow the entrance road to the end and turn right. Continue on that road for a short distance and on your left you will soon see tennis courts, pool and the club house.

## FROM THE CLUB'S EARLY DAYS

by Bill Holcombe

I am providing a safe haven for Bill Sheehan's Bird Club records until the best solution for their care can be decided. In the meantime I find looking over these beautifully and easily accessed records very interesting.

It was a shock to realize what whimps we have become with our 7:15 or 7:30 a.m. gatherings for field trips. The record includes all of the *Flyers* from the report of the first meeting on September 21, 1977, until May 1981. During this period trip gatherings were always 6:30 a.m. Perhaps the influx of "us retirees" prompted the change. That first field trip was to the Kiptopeke bird banding station.



The first *Flyer* was titled "Bird Club Notes," written by Susan Sturm, and the "seed" of the Club's well known record keeping program may have been planted in that first issue. Referring to Fred Blystone's report of a Black-crowned Night Heron on Jamestown Island, the editor says, "These are the kinds of observations that we need to record." After two meetings in Andrews Hall, Room 117 at Millington Hall became the Bird Club's home.

The change in "back yard" birding is emphasized by a report of the January 1978 field trip, led by Ruth Beck, which ended at the feeders on Ann Smith's house in Queens Lake, "where we enjoyed the Baltimore Orioles, House and Purple Finches, Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks." Wouldn't we all! Also in February '78, Bill Williams traveled to Martha's Vineyard to see a

European Curlew and while there observed a Northern Shrike, adding two life Birds to his list.

The Club's first logo appeared in the April '78 *Flyer* and I hope that it will reproduce in this one.

We will report more of interest in these records later.

## GREAT BACK YARD BIRD COUNT

Although the Cornell lab will accept reports on this count up until March 1, we took the summary as of February 28 and can safely assume that this is quite representative of the count.

The total number of lists filed is 52,984 and the number of species reported is 442. The number of birds reported is 4,604,095. In Virginia there were 128 species reported but the screen gave no break down of the number of reports by state.

Within Virginia the top ten cities measured by the number of species reported includes an area outlined by Charlottesville, Richmond, Norfolk, Chesapeake and Lynchburg, and with a stray Oakton, Washington D.C. suburb included. Williamsburg was the third highest measured by the species count, with Virginia Beach first and Chesapeake second.

In Virginia the most frequently reported birds in descending order were: Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, American Crow, House Finch, Blue Jay, American Robin, Dark-eyed Junco and Downy Woodpecker. When measured by number of birds observed, the top ten list in descending order is: American Crow, Common Grackle, American Robin, European Starling, Canada Goose, Mourning Dove, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Dark-eyed Junco, Ring-billed Gull and Northern Cardinal. These birds were not reported as frequently but the numbers of birds were higher.

We cannot compare the number of reports filed in Virginia this year and last as those numbers were not reported. So, comparing numbers of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings reported may not be too scientific but it does match what we have been seeing here and hearing about in the rest of the state. The number of American Robins reported this year is 11,378 compared to 8,909 last year

and the Cedar Waxwings reported this year is 2,694 compared to 1,288 last year.

We hope that you too, sent in a report as the more massive the number of reports, the better the picture of bird distribution. In fact, if we have enough interest within the club we could do a back yard bird count of our own a couple of times a year. That might be very illuminating.

## FIELD NOTES FOR FEBRUARY

*Year round birds and very common migrants are not usually reported. To report your sightings call Bill Holcombe 229-8057 or email him at <bowljack@aol.com>.*

Unusually large flocks of **Robins and Cedar Waxwings** continued through February and the Virginia Backyard Bird Count confirmed a large jump in these populations over last year. Mid-month there was a report of over one hundred **Cedar Waxwings** on Richmond Road in the trees by the William & Mary Alumni House. About that same time a report came of about 50 **Waxwings** in the trees in back of the Williamsburg Inn. Ruth Beck reported flocks of **Robins** out in Barhamsville in the thousands. The Audubon-VSO e-mail network contained such reports from all over the state and prompted much speculation as to the cause. Accurate or not, a likely explanation offered was that the ice and snow north of us have been very heavy. South and southwest of us drought has reduced the berry crop on trees and bushes that produce them. **Cedar Waxwings** and winter **Robins** are berry eaters so they've come our way.

Feb.3 - Lee Schuster said that the **Purple Finches** finally arrived and as many as three at a time were hanging around her feeder.

Feb. 8 - Cynthia Long was pleased to report a **Baltimore Oriole** at her feeder and had a story to go with it. A former neighbor of her's and an early bird club member, Ann Smith, was famous for her ability to attract birds to her yard, especially Baltimore Orioles. She tempted them all year long with citrus fruit and rinds filled with jelly. She told Cynthia that after she was gone she would will those Orioles to her. Cynthia said, "And today she made good on the promise."

Feb. 9 - Mary Ellen Kinney called from the Williamsburg Village Green to say she also had a **Baltimore Oriole** feeding outside her window.

Feb.11 - Shirley Devan was surprised to see three **Brown Pelicans** sitting on the pilings at the Crocker Landing area.

Feb. 12 - Donna LeClair called Joe Doyle to report a very early **Osprey** at Queens Lake. The earliest date in club records is February 10. Joe also reported 250 **Ring-necked Ducks** and twenty **Tundra Swans** at the Beaver Dam Pond in Camp Peary, plus 200 **Cedar Waxwings** at Winster Fax in Kingsmill.

Pam Young saw two ornamental cherry trees literally covered by **Cedar Waxwings** at her sister's house near Surry.

Feb.15 - Tom Armour added a life-list bird in Florida when he picked up a **Brown Noddy**. The birding was very good there and Tom found 112 species.

Feb. 16 - Bill Holcombe and Arnie Janot went looking for ducks. They were scattered thinly on the York River but included 15-20 **Hooded Mergansers**, and 30 **Red-breasted Mergansers** enthusiastically chasing a school of small fish up the river within 35 feet of us, 15 **Bonaparte Gulls** attracted to the fishing action, five **Horned Grebes**, one **Pied-billed Grebe**, eight **Bufflehead**, three **Common Goldeneye**, twenty **Lesser Scaup** and five **Common Loons** off the Yorktown beach.

Checking out the Vineyard pond we found ten **Ring-necked Ducks**, four **American Widgeon**, and two **Black Ducks**, plus **Mallards** and **Canada Geese**. We expected to pick up the **Green-winged Teal** and maybe some **Gadwall** at Lake Matoka but found that pond without a single bird on it!

The VSO - Audubon e-mail network also had some interesting reports:

Feb. 1 - Don Schwab found a **Western Grebe** 50 yards off of the Bay-Bridge Tunnel Bridge and risked making three U-turns to make sure of the bird.

Feb. 3 - An **Icelandic Gull** was found at the Prince William County landfill. It was accompanied by three **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**.

Feb. 4 - A **Wilson's Warbler** was identified at Dyke Marsh.

Feb. 8 - A first **Eastern Phoebe** was spotted at Bull Run Creek near Clifton.

Feb. 8 - An early **Ovenbird** was found near Fort Belvoir

Feb. 9 - Shirley Devan discovered the first new nest in the York River State Park **Bluebird** box trail which Shirley and her fellow volunteers monitor and take care of.

Feb. 11 - The **Loggerhead Shrike** was again spotted near the intersection of Rte. 55 and County Road 628 in eastern Fauquier County.

Feb. 12 and again on Feb. 20 - Visitors to Zion's Crossroads reported that the **Short-eared Owls** and the **Northern Harriers** are still putting on their show 40-30 minutes before sundown. (This was noted in last month's *Flyer*. Bill Holcombe has directions there, if you are interested.)

Feb. 16 - The **Trumpeter Swans** disappeared from the pond near Stuart's Draft but have again been found. (Something seems amiss in these directions but it may clear up when you near the scene.) "From Rte. 250, about 1.5 miles east of Staunton I-81 interchange, go south on Rt. 637 for about 1.1 miles. The road takes a 90-degree turn to the left but you continue on in the straight ahead lane. Continue until you see a pond on your left, ignoring the one on the right They were there at least a couple of days."

Feb. 21 - A **Gray Catbird** "appeared in my Annandale (Washington suburb) garden almost two months earlier than my previous early record."

## DUES REMINDER

Please remember to mail your 2001 dues to Chuck Rend, our treasurer. Call Chuck if, by chance, you have lost or misplaced the return envelope or dues schedule mailed with the last *Flyer*.

## YRSP PARK BLUEBIRD BOX TRAIL STARTING NEW SEASON

By Shirley Devan

We begin the Bluebird trail monitoring at York River State Park this month.

Bird Club volunteers met Saturday, February 17 to build about a half dozen bird boxes to replace some of the worn, dilapidated ones there. Park personnel have very generously allowed us to use their workshop and power tools to build the bird boxes. The volunteers purchased the lumber and screws for the project. The volunteers are Chris and Tony Dion, Jack and Terry Johnston, Dorothy Whitfield and me.

Dorothy Geyer will help with the monitoring this year but was not available for the box building.

As the spring and summer months go on I will provide you with regular updates from the trail. As always, we are eager to have new volunteers help with our efforts and we will provide all of the training necessary to monitor the boxes and to keep the records. It is very satisfying at the end of the summer to know how many Bluebirds we have helped add to the population.

## SPRING MIGRATION PROGRAM AT COASTAL VIRGINIA WILDLIFE OBSERVATORY

by Brian Taber

Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory will again operate a spring migration program at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife refuge. Daily songbird banding will be handled by last year's bander, Calvin Brennan and a new staff member, Johnida Martin, from South Dakota. The bunker station will again be open to the public. They will also be conducting point-counts and other bird surveys. The season will run from March 1 to May 31.

There were many surprises in last year's program and so this year we are starting almost a month earlier. If you have questions or need more information please feel free to contact me at 253-1181.

## BIRDS THAT WILL BE HEADING NORTH FROM US

The Bird Club Annotated List published a couple of years ago includes some vital statistics about each bird listed and its history in our area. An important statistic is the date of the last sighting of winter residents, just before they leave here for northern nesting grounds. Here is the list of such birds with final dates in March and April. You can do the club a great service by reporting sightings of any of the birds in our area **later** than the listed dates. The March date is underlined.

Horned Grebe	April 3	Hooded Merganser	April 28
Red-necked Grebe	April 11	Brown Creeper	April 29
Northern Pintail	April 27	Gold-crowned Kinglet	April 22
<u>Long-tailed Duck</u>	March 22	Fox Sparrow	April 4
Common Goldeneye	April 24		

## BIRDS THAT WILL BE HEADING NORTH TO US

The recorded arrival dates of these birds have special significance. Reports of any of these birds arriving **before** their published arrival dates become important updates to our Annotated List. Your help in providing these data are appreciated. Most of our tropical migrants have arrival dates in March or April. The February and March dates are underlined.

<u>Osprey</u>	February 6	Gray-cheeked Thrush	April 26
<u>Black-bellied Plover</u>	March 24	Swainson's Thrush	April 11
Semipalmated Plover	April 26	Wood Thrush	April 15
Solitary Sandpiper	April 14	White-eyed Vireo	April 12
Willet	April 26	Yellow-throated Vireo	April 17
Semipalmated Sandpiper	April 22	Philadelphia Vireo	April 23
<u>Western Sandpiper</u>	February 2	Red-eyed Vireo	April 11
White-rumped Sandpiper	April 28	Nashville Warbler	April 18
<u>Pectoral Sandpiper</u>	March 15	<u>Northern Parula</u>	March 31
Stilt Sandpiper	April 13	Yellow Warbler	April 17
<u>Caspian Tern</u>	March 27	Chestnut-sided Warbler	April 28
<u>Royal Tern</u>	March 6	Black-throated Blue Warbler	April 16
Common Tern	April 6	Black-throated Green Warbler	April 14
Least Tern	April 28	Blackburnian Warbler	April 22
Black-billed Cuckoo	April 22	<u>Yellow-throated Warbler</u>	March 14
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	April 16	<u>Prairie Warbler</u>	March 30
Chuck-will's-widow	April 17	Black-poll Warbler	April 13
Whip-poor-will	April 1	Black & White Warbler	March 26
Chimney Swift	April 2	American Redstart	April 6
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	April 4	<u>Ovenbird</u>	April 6
Eastern Wood-pewee	April 18	Northern Waterthrush	March 18
Acadian Flycatcher	April 24	Louisiana Waterthrush	March 16
Great-crested Flycatcher	April 16	Kentucky Warbler	April 15
Eastern Kingbird	April 18	Hooded Warbler	April 12
<u>Purple Martin</u>	March 9	Summer Tanager	April 17
<u>Northern Rough-winged Swallow</u>	March 10	Scarlet Tanager	April 12
<u>Bank Swallow</u>	March 31	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	April 21
<u>Barn Swallow</u>	March 11	Blue Grosbeak	April 14
Veery	April 25	Indigo Bunting	April 3
		Orchard Oriole	April 20