



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 25, Number 1

January 2001

THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will be on Wednesday, January 17 at 7:30 in Room 117 Millington Hall, on the William & Mary campus. Program Director Dan Cristol has arranged for Linda Winter of the American Bird Conservancy in Washington D.C. to be this month's speaker. She will be revisiting one of our favorite controversies: what to do about the problem of cats eating birds. The American Bird Conservancy is one of the most influential friends birds have right now in Washington. Like the nature Conservancy or Audubon, they are an effective grassroots group that educates the public and lobbies on behalf of the birds. Unlike other conservation groups, ABC is wholly dedicated to protecting birds. We would all do well to find out more about this exceptional group's activities. To check them out before the meeting visit their user-friendly website at <www.abcbirds.org/>

Linda will be talking specifically about one of the Conservancy's recent initiatives. ABC Cats Indoors! Campaign seeks to inform cat owners, decision-makers and the general public that free-roaming cats are a significant threat to birds and other wildlife, pose a threat to humans, and often live short, painful lives. The campaign is working to secure the humane removal of free-roaming cats from sensitive wildlife areas and to persuade pet owners to keep their cats indoors. Together with The Humane Society of the United States and the American Humane Association, they developed a brochure, an education kit and a poster for use by more than a thousand groups across the country participating in the campaign.

JANUARY FIELD TRIP

Tom Armour is starting off the New Year with a field trip on Saturday, January 20, that seeks to find all of those water fowl that visit our area in mid-winter. The group will gather at 7:15 a.m. in the Colony Shopping Center parking lot on Jamestown Road, up from the Fresh Market, and plan to leave there by 7:30. It will cover the York River adjacent to the Colonial Parkway and some other good water fowl areas if time allows.

WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED DONATES AGAIN

For the months of April through October 2000 Wild Birds Unlimited was able to return \$228 to our treasury. They refund to us the amount of state sales tax that is collected from club members making purchases there. All you have to do to make this work on your purchases there is to identify yourself as a club member. Three cheers for Wild Birds Unlimited!

MESSAGE FROM HUGH BEARD

As the new president of the Williamsburg Bird Club, I would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year (and a Happy New Millennium for you die-hard purists.) I hope that this new year is filled with exciting birding as we all continue to participate in one of the nation's most popular pastimes.

Speaking of participation, I want to encourage everyone, expert and novice alike, to get involved with Cornell's Lab of Ornithology Project Feeder Watch. It is a fun activity that doesn't involve much more than what most of us already do:

watching our feeders. By participating, you become an integral part of one of the largest citizen research projects in the world, helping scientists assess the population trends of birds found at our feeders during the winter. This is one way that researchers determine when a bird species may be in trouble. If you are interested call (607) 254-2427 or visit their web site at < <http://www.birds.cornell.edu> > and they will get you signed up and send you the information on how to collect the data. There is a small fee to cover the cost of running the program. If you have any questions, feel free to ask me or Lee Schuster (I hope that you don't mind, Lee). It's a great way to learn about birds while lending them a hand.

I hope that I serve you ably this coming year. If you have suggestions or concerns, please feel free to "bend my ear." Call or e-mail me at <hughbeard@earthlink.net>

Happy Birding! — Hugh Beard

101st CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

While we've had some cold days and some stormy days for the Christmas Bird Count, but we never before had a day quite like Sunday December 17. As dawn approached so did thunder and lightning accompanied at times by torrential rain. The U.S. Post Office apparently decides weather questions concerning the count, as one has never been canceled. Accordingly, counters spent the early hours huddled in cars waiting for a break in the weather. Hugh Beard and his group on the Middle Plantation got fooled into thinking that one of the several breaks was the end of the storm and got deep into the woods in time to get drenched in the next downpour. Over on Hog Island Brian Taber said that it was almost ten o'clock before they could leave the car. When the rain did stop the wind picked up and blew in gusts all afternoon — hardly the best birding weather.

Despite these terrible conditions our 22 birders turned in 103 species. With Count Week birds added, it got up to 107. Considering that our lifetime average is 108 species and only 100 were found in the extremely windy count of 1999, this

year's 103 looks like an excellent record. However, the count also includes the numbers of each species observed and in almost every case the numbers of a given species was down substantially from prior years. Part of the count data we report is the weather conditions, so for long term trends the weather conditions on a particular count can be factored in.

While a great deal of skill and experience goes into completing a count such as this, let's not forget that there is a role for luck in the business too. For instance, there were twelve species with only a single sighting: Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Green-backed Heron, Redhead, Osprey, Eastern Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, House Wren, Water Pipit, Savannah Sparrow, and Brewer's Blackbird. Just two birds represented another five species. Of course, this reasoning can be turned around to point out the skill of our field group in searching out these single birds!

Among the surprises this year were an Osprey, a Green-backed Heron found in the Middle Plantation area, a Water Pipit and a Brewer's Blackbird at Hog Island. Dan Cristol found a Baltimore Oriole the day before the count which can be included in Count Week list and Bill Williams on the day following the count found a Merlin and a Fish Crow on the Greensprings Nature Trail. (We may add birds seen three days before and three days after the count day to the Count Week List.)

Here are the 22 dedicated birders who stayed with this Christmas Count through thunder, lightening, downpours and 20 mph wind gusts: Tom Armour, Hugh Beard, Ruth Beck, Catherine Bond, Kevin Croll, Gary Driscoll, Betteye Fields, Ron Giese, Carol McAllister, Paul McAllister, Sandy Peterson, Mary Pulley, David Schuster, Lee Schuster, David Shantz, Dot Silsby, Jandy and Randy Strickland, Brian Taber, Jane Trigo, Bill Williams and Marilyn Ziegler.

I also had to reach the conclusion that my computer skills are not really adequate for the new Christmas Count reporting system. There was an option of filing a paper report this year with a warning that only computer reports would be

accepted next year. I spent a good eight or nine hours connecting into and out of "catch 22" situations before I could finally sign off on my report. Even then I had to use the comment section to explain the four birds on our list that weren't on their's, as neither their "Add a Species" nor their "Rare Bird Report" accommodated my needs. Hopefully, they will have a better email response system or we will have a better compiler by next year.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT ON THE BAY BRIDGE TUNNEL IS.

A cold made me feel just too lousy to go out on our CBC on December 17, so, remembering last year's trip to those islands in February and knowing that Ned Brinkley was handling it, I decided to go to that CBC on January 5. The wind and temperature made those islands even colder than the last trip but one bird made the trip worthwhile. A male Harlequin Duck in full, bright color accompanied by two females was in close to the rocks for most of thirty minutes and he was really magnificent. But the also-rans included some very nice birds. Both Cormorants were on the rocks and Purple Sandpipers were easily spotted scampering around those same rocks. A single Old Squaw (now a Long-tail) was bobbing about and Ned Brinkley said that the two distant brown blobs were Common Eider.

An hour on Island Four had us cold enough to welcome the idea of driving over to Island Three, where we found three Buffleheads, a Red-breasted Merganser and five more Purple Sandpipers. Island Two yielded a dozen Lesser Scaup and a pair of Ruddy Ducks that were curled up so tightly that we couldn't be sure what they were until they unwound for some stretching. Along with hot coffee and a Snickers bar, Island One provided a pair of Ruddy Turnstones.

It was the kind of day that made for a nice drive home. — Bill Holcombe

DECEMBER FIELD REPORTS

The Christmas Bird Count Chart gives a pretty good idea of what happened locally last month,

but a couple of local reports need listing and there are some interesting reports on the Audubon Virginia Bird List:

Tom Armour celebrated Pearl Harbor Day with a special birding report from Kingsmill: 2 Shovelers, 20 Hooded Mergansers, 8 Ringneck Ducks, 4 Pied-billed Grebes, 2 Mute Swans, 1 Coot, 7 Great Egrets, 1 Great Blue Heron and, for good measure, a lone beaver. Away from the pond were Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Kingfisher, Red-tailed Hawk and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Not a bad day! And at the end of the month he had a couple of Winter Wrens.

From the Bird List comes this rare Bird Report:

Dec.13 to present — Snowy Owl at Windmill Point Park.

Dec.28 to present — Painted Bunting at a feeder in the vicinity of Windmill Point.

Dec.13 to present — Trumpeter Swans near Stuart's Draft off of Rt.64. In the same area, Lapland Longspur and Horned Larks. Also in the same area Dec.22 and 26 — Loggerhead Shrike.

All month — Short-eared Owls about a mile and a half from Rt. 64 on Rt.15 north.

Dec.17 — On the Hopewell CBC, Greater White-front Goose and Wilson's Warbler.

Dec. 17 — Western Kingbird at Westover Plantation.

Dec. 24 — Harlequin Duck female at Bay-bridge Island 3.

Dec.31 — Common Eider, two, at Bay-Bridge Island 4.

(If you want directions there, I have them. — Bill Holcombe)

Jan. 2 (but too good to pass up) — A Rufous Hummingbird, female, trapped, banded and released in Portsmouth, Va. and still using feeder. Usual pattern is frequent feeder visits at 7 to 8 a.m. and then less frequently until the frequent pattern resumes in late afternoon. The home owner invites birders to come and see the bird at 4701 Templer Drive, Portsmouth. Both feeders can be seen from the street and driveway "and my neighbors are used to strangers with binoculars lurking about."

CODE OF BIRDING ETHICS

Observing some discourteous and rowdy-like behavior from a weekend crowd looking for the Snowy Owl at Windmill Point, prompted Mike Callahan from the Howard County Maryland Bird Club to put this message on the Audubon Bird-List Report.

Everyone who enjoys birds and birding must always respect wildlife, its environment, and the rights of others. In any conflict of interest between birds and birders, the welfare of the birds and their environment comes first.

- Promote the welfare of birds and their environment.
- To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording or filming.
- Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area.
- Before advertising the presence of a rare bird, evaluate the potential for disturbing the bird, its surroundings, and other people in the area, and proceed only if access can be controlled, disturbance minimized, and permission has been obtained from private land-owners.
- Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist; otherwise keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.
- Respect the law and rights of others. Do not enter private property without the owner's explicit permission. Follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing use of roads and public area, both at home and abroad.
- Practice common courtesy in contacts with other people. Your exemplary behavior will generate goodwill with birders and non-birders alike.
- Group birding, whether organized or impromptu, requires special care. Each individual in the group has responsibilities as a group member. Respect the interests, rights and skills of

fellow birders, as well as people participating in other legitimate outdoor activities. Freely share your knowledge and experience, except where code 1 applies. Be especially helpful to beginning birders.

- Be an exemplary ethical role model for the group. Teach through word and example.
- Keep groups to a size that limits impact on the environment and does not interfere with others using the same area. Learn and inform the group of any special circumstances applicable to the area being visited. Acknowledge that professional tour companies bear a special responsibility to place the welfare of birds and the benefit of public knowledge ahead of the company's commercial interests. They should keep track of tour sightings, document unusual occurrences and submit records to appropriate organizations.

A SPECIAL FAN LETTER

As this doesn't happen very often — in fact it's the only fan message we have ever received — we hope our readers will forgive our reporting it. Dwight Davis of WHRO-Radio, in the opinion of many including us, is the best announcer on Public Radio. I cannot enjoy breakfast without him. He recently saw fit to send an e-mail message saying how much he enjoys reading *The Flyer* every month and admits that the field reports always make him wish that he had more time for such events.

He also wanted to thank whoever decided to send the monthly newsletter to him "and suspects that Ruth Beck may have had something to do with it." Actually this very good idea came to Co-Editor, Phil Young, when he heard Dwight giving an interesting report on a bird species during a Saturday morning broadcast. Phil thought Dwight might like to make use of our "Bird of the Month" articles as source material for future reports about birds.

Thank you Dwight Davis for saying nice things about the Williamsburg Bird Club, Ruth Beck and our monthly *Flyer*.

PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES ABOUT CATS EATING BIRDS

(Excerpted from American Bird Conservancy web site)

Cats are increasingly the pet of choice for Americans. Introduced when Europeans arrived in North America, cats were brought here in large numbers during the later part of the 19th century in an attempt to control burgeoning rodent populations associated with the spread of agriculture. Before cat litter was developed (about 50 years ago), it was difficult to maintain cats as indoor pets. Cats have many attributes in their favor, and are especially suitable pets for the elderly and people living in apartments. With respect to keeping cats indoors, a telephone survey conducted for American Bird Conservancy (ABC) in August 1997 by Marketing and Research Resources, Inc. indicates good news and bad for birds and cats. Sixty-five per cent of all respondents believe that keeping cats indoors is safer and healthier for their cats. Many cat owners keep their cats indoors and many who currently permit their cats to go outdoors are considering making their next cat an indoor cat. Better understanding and appreciation of how behavioral and physical needs of cats can be accommodated indoors, combined with calls for responsible pet ownership, appear to be creating a trend in favor of indoor cats. Unfortunately, despite efforts by animal welfare groups to encourage responsible pet ownership, some people still believe it is acceptable, and even necessary, for cats to roam. In addition, many cat owners have not fully committed themselves to ownership of their cats. Studies by welfare groups have also shown that many people considered to be "cat owners" have been "adopted" by a cat who has shown up on their doorstep, rather than their purposefully setting out to acquire a cat. Here are some of the study results:

35% keep their cats indoors all of the time.

31% keep them, "mostly" indoors.

35% of owners who let cats go outdoors indicate that their next cat will be an indoor pet.

49% say they would be likely to keep cats indoors

if it would be beneficial to wildlife.

41% of all respondents were concerned about cats preying on birds and other wildlife.

53% of cat-owning respondents were concerned about cat predation.

47% have seen their cats with captured animals.

68% of all respondents, and 60% of cat-owning respondents, agreed that stray cats should be humanely removed from areas set aside for wildlife.

EMILY SHARRETT PASSES AWAY

Emily Sharrett was a lovely person and an enthusiastic club member for several years. She was an excellent birder, regularly leading our field trips. We're saddened by her passing and will miss her.

HEY, IT'S DUES TIME!

Please return your 2001 dues in the enclosed, pre-addressed envelope to Chuck Rend, our treasurer. The dues are unchanged this year, with only one exception — student's dues are now increased from \$3.00 per person to \$5.00 per person. That brings the students' dues closer to the actual cost of producing and mailing their newsletters.

Last year 43 generous people became patrons of the Williamsburg Bird Club by paying \$25 for their membership renewal instead of the usual amount. Costs are rising and this generosity probably staved off a general dues increase. We hope that even more members will voluntarily increase their dues contributions this year.

WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB YEAR 2000 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

Common Loon		Red-tailed Hawk	8	Brown Creeper	3
Pied-billed Grebe	1	American Kestrel	12	Carolina Wren	39
Horned Grebe	40	Wild Turkey	0	House Wren	1
Brown Pelican	1	Northern Bobwhite	6	Winter Wren	8
Dble.-crest Cormorant	5	American Coot	7	Golden-crowned Kinglet	38
Great Blue Heron	869	Killdeer	29	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	48
Great Egret	72	Greater Yellowlegs	3	Eastern Bluebird	161
Green-back Heron	3	Western Sandpiper	0	Hermit Thrush	5
Tundra Swan	1	Common Snipe	0	American Robin	159
Mute Swan	46	American Woodcock	0	Northern Mockingbird	30
Canada Goose	11	Laughing Gull	34	Brown Thrasher	2
Wood Duck	1542	Bonaparte's Gull	46	Water Pipit	1
Green-winged Teal	8	Ring-billed Gull	1581	Cedar Waxwing	529
American Black Duck	13	Herring Gull	137	Starling	1234
Mallard	147	Great. Black-backed Gull	70	Yellow-rumped Warbler	248
Northern Pintail	2	Forster's Tern	9	Pine Warbler	15
Gadwall	50	Rock Dove	118	Palm Warbler	2
American Widgeon	24	Mourning Dove	149	Common Yellowthroat	3
Canvasback	839	Eastern Screech Owl	1	Northern Cardinal	104
Redhead	1	Great Horned Owl	1	Rufous-sided Towhee	32
Ring-necked Duck	536	Barred Owl	1	Chipping Sparrow	15
Lesser Scaup	11	Belted Kingfisher	20	Field Sparrow	4
Common Goldeneye	4	Redheaded Woodpecker	6	Savannah Sparrow	1
Bufflehead	193	Red-bellied Woodpecker	52	Fox Sparrow	4
Hooded Merganser	102	Yell.-bellied Sapsucker	6	Song Sparrow	75
Red-breasted Merganser	19	Downy Woodpecker	17	Swamp Sparrow	19
Ruddy Duck	488	Hairy Woodpecker	2	White-throated Sparrow	277
Black Vulture	35	Northern Flicker	62	Dark-eyed Junco	182
Turkey Vulture	245	Pileated Woodpecker	14	Red-winged Blackbird	2715
Osprey	1	Eastern Phoebe	4	Eastern Meadowlark	32
Bald Eagle (adult)	25	Blue Jay	40	Brewer's Blackbird	1
Bald Eagle (immature)	28	American Crow	180	Common Grackle	1720
Northern Harrier	2	Fish Crow	0	Brown-headed Cowbird	147
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	Carolina Chickadee	124	House Sparrow	55
Cooper's Hawk	4	Tufted Titmouse	51	House Finch	101
Red-shouldered Hawk	5	Red-breasted Nuthatch	0	Goldfinch	118
		White-breasted Nuthatch	27		
		Brown-headed Nuthatch	7		