



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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JANUARY MEETING

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will take place on Jan. 16 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 of Millington Hall on the campus of William & Mary. Program Director Dan Cristol has arranged for Dr. Randy Chambers to address us. He is a professor of biology professor and director of the new Keck Environmental Lab built last year on the shore of Lake Matoaka. Prof. Chambers will talk about the ecosystem of Lake Matoaka — what's right about it, what's wrong with it, and what the future holds for research, recreation and for bird life on this nearby lake.

FIELD TRIP TO THE YORK RIVER

Tom Armour feels that the warm weather kept the ducks scarce when he tried this trip in November so he wants to try it again after some real winter weather. We will meet in front of Wild Birds Unlimited in the Monticello Shopping Center on January 19 at 8:00 a.m. We should be back by 12:30 or so. The prospects for sighting water fowl should really be excellent by then and Tom will lead the group.

DUES ARE DUE

A return envelope is enclosed for you to mail in your annual dues payment to Chuck Rend, our treasurer. The amounts are unchanged from last year.

In 2001 a record number of 44 members made themselves patrons of the bird club by paying \$25 for their memberships. This generosity is greatly appreciated by your officers and if repeated, it will help stave off a general dues increase.

KEVIN CROLL

Most Club members will remember Kevin Croll, a bright young graduate student who received one of our research grants in 2000 to do a study on the American Oyster Catcher. He reported on that study, "Reproductive Status and Population Size of the American Oyster Catcher on Coastal Virginia," at a club meeting.

Kevin's promising career in biology (he would have received his Masters Degree in September) was ended when he died very suddenly at home in Cincinnati on December 30. His funeral on January 4 was attended by eleven faculty and student members of the William & Mary Biology Department, including Ruth Beck, who was Kevin's thesis advisor. Ruth said, "Kevin really made a contribution. He made a difference, he'll be missed."

FIELD NOTES FOR DECEMBER

Off and on throughout the month Bobbie and Ron Giese had the very good fortune to host a **Baltimore Oriole** on their feeder. The winter coloration was not what is expected of an oriole so Ron took a photo to Bill Williams who verified the identification. Ron said that the oriole fed exclusively at the feeder containing the Don and Lillian Stokes' Peanut and Berry Mix.

Alex Minarik checked her records and found that she had observed 67 species in her yard during 2001. This included such notables as Wild Turkey, three vireo species, nine warbler species and six woodpeckers. (*Wish I had such a productive backyard! Editor*)

Dec. 02 – Bill Williams found "great birds" on the

Greensprings Trail, with an **American Woodcock** and a singing **Fox Sparrow** for highlights.

Dec. 03 – Tom Armour reports after a morning look at the James River: 3 **Common Loons**, 20 **Red-breasted Mergansers**, 1 **Bufflehead**, 75 **Forster Terns**, 5 **Great Black-backed Gulls**, 50 **Laughing Gulls**, 6 **Herring Gulls**, 4 **Ringbilled Gulls**, 5 **Coot** and 2 **Double-crested Cormorants**.

Dec. 08 – Tony and Chris Dion return to Jamestown Island seeking more information about “fish-herding” **Cormorants**. Using a scope they observed 25 to 30 **Double-crested Cormorants** on the far side of the James exhibiting the same behavior they previously observed. The birds were rushing back and forth across the water with great flapping of wings and occasionally stopping to feast on the herded fish. On this visit a large flock of 250 to 300 **cormorants** flew overhead.

Dec. 08 – Shirley Devan and friends visited a new birding area for her, Henricus Park and nearby Dutch Gap along the James River near Hopewell, Virginia. Along with the expected seasonal birds, they saw a **Barred Owl**, 2 **Bald Eagles**, plus **Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks**. Shirley liked the area and suspects that it holds some very good groups of birds at various times of the year. She recommends it for a club trip some day.

Dec. 11 – Tom Armour finds his first fall **Brown Creeper** in the yard.

Dec. 12 – Tom Armour counts 11 **Brown Pelicans** at the Kingsmill Marina and finds the **Laughing Gulls** are gone. The next day the pelican count jumped to 33 and there were 9 **Coots** paddling about.

Dec. 16 – 29 Participants in the Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count identify 108 species including the first CBC **rufous-type hummingbird**. (*See article in this issue.*)

Dec. 20 – Tom sees lots of all kinds of gulls with 2 **Laughing Gulls** back in the count along with 50 **Forster's Terns**, 5 **Coot** and 35 **Mallards**.

Dec. 29-30 – Shirley Devan had a good birding weekend starting Saturday afternoon at the District Sports Complex off Longhill Road with a mature **Bald Eagle**, 2 **male Red-headed Woodpeckers**, a pair of **Hooded Mergansers**, 2 **Pied-**

billed Grebes “plus all of the usual suspects.” Across from the ball-park, “I spotted a **Northern Harrier** on the ground munching some luckless creature. Then six **Meadowlarks** flew into the field.”

“Sunday I set off with scope and a cup of warm coffee and saw: **Wild Turkey** on Centerville Road and the usual suspects at the Greensprings Trail bridge over the swamp: an adult **Bald Eagle** and an immature one circling over the Jamestown Island causeway and fishing in the James River. I saw many of the same species back at the Longhill Road Sports Complex, but also a **Kestrel** sitting on the **Harrier's** perch and then flying and hovering as he looked for lunch. Then he was joined by a second **Kestrel**. My day! These are my favorite birds!”

Dec.30 – Tom Armour finds a **Rufous-type Hummingbird** drinking at his bird drip-fountain. The bird returned on the 31st, Jan. 1 and Jan. 5.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (CBC)

Twenty-nine participants scoured the swamps, creeks, wood lots, rivers and ponds of the Williamsburg CBC Circle to identify 108 species of birds. The circle specified by the Audubon Society is centered on the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Information Center and has a diameter of 15 miles. It also includes some special arrangements such as the entire Hog Island Wildlife Area and the ferry ride to and from Surrey.

It was a beautiful clear day for winter birding with early morning temperatures a bit above freezing and reaching the low fifties in the afternoon. The species count was just over the club average of 107 and short of our best, which was 112. Along with the expected birds there were several notables. The rufous-type Hummingbird is a first for our CBC. There have been several reports elsewhere in Virginia this fall and one banding and positive identification as a Rufous Hummingbird. Our bird was in the Settlers Mill area and reported by Bill Williams. It was last seen and photographed here about ten years ago.

The need to use the designation “rufous-type hummingbird” is caused by the fact that in non-

breeding plumage it is impossible to distinguish between the Rufous Hummingbird, Ellen's Hummingbird and the Broad-tailed Hummingbird without a hand held inspection.

Other notables included a Greater Scaup, Snow Goose, Royal Tern, Marsh Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Pipit, Merlin and Virginia Rail. While not actually in the account, we got credit for a Lesser Black-backed Gull reported on another day during the week of the count.

There were also species that we expect to see on this count that were not found: e.g., Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Bonaparte's Gull and House Wren.

Participants in this count included: Lorna and Mike Anderberg, Tom Armour, Hugh Beard, Ruth Beck, Catherine Bond, Grace and Joe Doyle, Gary Driscoll, Bettye Fields, Adrienne Frank, Bobbie and Ron Giese, Renae Held, Bill Holcombe, Carolyn Lowe, Carol and Paul McAllister, Alex Minarik, Sandy Petersen, Mary Pulley, David and Lee Schuster, David Shantz, Sylvia Shuey, Dot Silsby, Brian Taber, Jane Trigo and Bill Williams.

(You will find Grace and Joe Doyle's report on Camp Peary birds included in the Christmas Bird Count Report under Camp Peary.)

VIRGINIA FIELD NOTE ITEMS

Dec.13 – A Selaphorous Hummingbird has been at a feeder in Lynchburg every day for a week.

Dec.15 – From a Winchester base, a report of a Merlin in Frederick County and a Gold Eagle in Page County.

Dec. 16 – Henslow Sparrow reported near Gainsville, Va.

Dec. 17 – Female Baltimore oriole at Dyke Marsh in Northern Va.

Dec. 17 – Hummingbird near Washington but too back-lit to get good field marks.

Dec. 22 – Clay Colored Sparrow at Manassas Battlefield.

Dec. 25 – Lincoln Sparrow reported in an unusual city setting which was not identified.

Dec. 25 – Thayer's Gull on the CBBT islands.

Dec.26 – CBC on the CBBT islands reports these firsts for that count: Canada Goose, Snow Goose,

Parasitic Jaeger, Pomewraine Jaeger, Common Gull. Also had Harlequin Ducks, Purple Sandpipers, Icelandic Gulls and Little Gulls.

Dec.29 – Black-headed Gull seen on the CBBT islands by group including Mitchell Byrd.

Also picked up a poem to help you distinguish between Eared grebes and Horned Grebes:

With a cap that's lower
Than his eyes of red,
And a bill that's slimmer
On a taller head,
The Eared Grebe's neck is of a darker hue
Which makes the ID easy for you.

The Horned grebe has a flatter head.
His cap is level with his eyes of red.
His neck is lighter, his bill tipped with yellow,
Which makes it easy to ID this fellow.

And a couple of interesting reports about how tough hummingbirds can be. They seem to be of special interest with all of the winter news of hummingbirds that we are hearing:

"We live in Kern County (CA) on the side of Bear Mountain at elevation 4725 ft. One or two male Anna's (*Hummingbirds*) hang out with us the entire winter. After a light snow, I will go out to wipe the feeders and perhaps replace the juice. Remarkably one of the ports will already be open, having been drilled through by one "hummy" or other. No females stay, although they arrive by late winter. However, a male or two are here through snow and temperatures sometimes in the teens."

"I have just returned from a short trip north of Seattle, and on the day that I arrived I visited a local birder who shared her male Anna's Hummingbird with me. It was at her back yard feeder. She told me that this is a winter long resident and that there are several there from time to time. I was there on a windy, cold, damp day. She told me that other birders have reported seeing Anna's Hummingbirds throughout the winter, all the way to the Canadian border."

Tom Armour hopes that he has a winter resident Selaphorous!

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