

# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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## NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will take place, Wednesday, February 20, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 Millington Hall on the campus of William & Mary. Dan Cristol has arranged for Ruth Boettcher, biologist with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to share insights with us from her area of specialization. Ruth has had a long career dealing with endangered species of birds, sea turtles and squirrels. She will share this experience and offer ideas of what can be done to improve the situations for some of Virginia's rarest residents, such as the Piping Plover.

## SNOW BUNTING STAYS FOR JANUARY FIELD TRIP

Tom Armour's field trip to the York River on January 19 not only succeeded in finding water fowl on the river but the Snow Bunting found at the Indian Fields parking area was still in approximately the same location. Alex Minarik had spotted this bird Monday, Jan. 8. The entire group got good views of the bird as it fed and preened not far from the parking area. It was a life bird for many. Meanwhile, the surface of the York River and nearby ponds and inlets held a good array: Red-throated Loons, Common Loons, Pied-billed Grebes, Horned Grebes, Brown Pelican, Double-crested Cormorants, Mute Swans, Tundra Swans, American Widgeon, Canvasback, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck and Bonaparte's Gulls. Also spotted two adult Bald Eagles, Savannah Sparrows and a handful of the usual residents. The lucky participants included David Anderton, Betty and Bill Caldwell, Carol and Dave Gulf, Renae Held, Meg

and Al Karb, Carolynne Lowe, Alex Minarik and David des Rochers.

*P.S. Report from Tom McCary says Snow Bunting was still there Feb. 4!*

## FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP ON GREENSPRINGS TRAIL

Bill Williams will lead the February Field trip along the Greensprings Nature Trail on February 23. The group will gather at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot in back of Jamestown High School. Bill has been walking this trail regularly ever since it was opened and has great familiarity with it and where the birds will most likely be found.

## JANUARY FIELD REPORTS

Jan. 1 – Bill Williams on the York River finds two Red-throated Loons, three Common Loons, one Horned Grebe, a Brown Pelican, four Common Goldeneyes, four Canvasbacks, a Laughing Gull, twelve Forster's Terns and numerous Buffleheads and Ruddy Ducks.

Jan. 1 – Shirley Devan sees her first winter Purple Finch at her feeder.

Jan. 5 – Tom Armour reports that the rufous type hummingbird is still in his yard but has not yet used the feeders. (See article on this bird, positively identified as a Rufous Hummingbird.)

Jan. 7 – Tom Armour at the Kingsmill marina sees five Brown Pelican, eight Coots and one Pied-bill Grebe. In the yard he had a Barred Owl, a Hermit Thrush, and four Field Sparrows.

Jan. 7 – Bill Holcombe finds Ring-necked Ducks, American Widgeon and Gadwall on The

Vineyard's Pond.

Jan. 8 – Alex Minarik finds a Snow Bunting just in front of the parking area on the river side of the Indian Fields turn-off of the Colonial Parkway.

Tom Armour and Bill Holcombe answer her phone call and also get excellent looks at this rare visitor. Alex follows Tom Armour home to his rufous-like hummingbird and sees it too! Two life birds that day for Alex.

Jan. 9 – Bill Snyder, on Powhatan Creek, finds six Hooded Mergansers and wonders why he's seen none of the usual Fox Sparrows this winter.

Jan. 12 – Lee Schuster reports that Purple Finches have been on her feeder all week, as many as six at a time.

Jan. 12 – Tom McCary sees a Red-breasted Nuthatch on the feeder at Sherwood Forest and then sees it three or four more times up 'til the 24<sup>th</sup>.

Jan. 17 – Tom sees first of several sightings of male and female Purple Finches on a feeder at Sherwood Forest. "House Finches were also around the feeder and when you see them together you wonder why the confusion."

Jan. 19 – Alex has three Purple Finches in her yard. Also took a trip to Hog Island where she found, in addition to thousands of Canada Geese, several dozen Tundra Swans, Mallards, Black Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, Gadwalls, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead, and six Redheads. (We don't see many Redheads here.) Also observed Bald Eagles, Great Egrets, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Golden-crowned Kinglets and Fox Sparrows.

Jan. 20 – Bill Williams finds a brand new bird for our area and for the Green Spring Trail, a Clay-colored Sparrow at the intersection of the Main Loop and the Mainland Farm outlook. There was also a Fox Sparrow at the same location.

Jan. 20 – Alex finds that her Snow Bunting is still hanging around the Indian Fields parking area.

Jan. 22 – Tom Armour also has a Purple Finch.

Jan 25 - Tom Armour visits Sunken Meadows and finds it full of ducks: 700 Gadwalls, 600 American Widgeon, 25 Hooded mergansers, ten Pintails. There were also four Bald Eagles overhead. *(To get to Sunken Meadows: Take Scotland Ferry,*

*leave it on Rt. 31; at town of Surrey turn right onto 626; stay on 626 including a short jog to the left and you will cross the bottom of sunken Meadow 8-9 miles from Surrey.)*

Jan. 27 – Armin Richter reports a mature Bald Eagle sitting on the last channel marker before the ferry docks at Scotland.

**Month of January at Camp Peary** - Grace and Joe Doyle combine their weekly trips: Pied-billed Grebe, Tundra Swans (35 on 1/13), Wood Duck, Gadwall, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck (1,000 on 1/13), Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Belted Kingfisher, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Rufous Towhee, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow and Eastern Meadow Lark. (Joe also reports watching a Bald Eagle trying to take a Mallard off a Kingsmill pond. "Just missed – some sight!" says Joe.)

Feb. 3 – Special Bulletin: Bill Williams finds the Clay-colored Sparrow at the same location.

## REPORTS OF INTEREST FROM THE VIRGINIA BIRDLINE

Jan. 3 – Cape Charles Christmas Bird Count usually has the highest species count in the state and some of the highlights seem worth passing on: "Gannets were unbelievable (14,100), ...Red-throated Loon (318), Red-necked Grebe (1), Hooded Merganser (7,350), Harlequin Duck (1), Peregrine Falcon (5), American Oystercatcher (121), Marbled Godwit (51), Lesser Black-backed Gull (3), Red Knot (31). Some of the rarer reports included: Greater White-fronted Goose, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Blue-headed Vireo, Nashville Warbler, Sparrows: Ipswich, Nelson's, Saltmarsh, Sharp-tailed, Seaside, Fox and Lincoln's.

The tide went out and stranded the parties on Smith Island and Myrtle Island where they built huge bonfires to attract attention! This is quite a different birding environment, just 40 miles away!

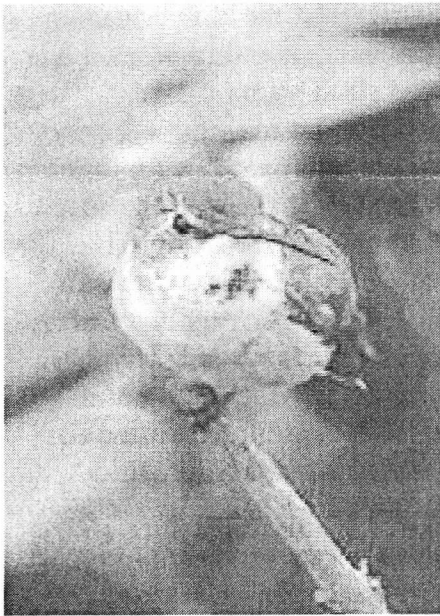
Jan. 9. – 11 Evening Grosbeaks reported in Konnarock, Va. That is way over near Tennessee and we mention it only because it was the only report of Evening Grosbeaks in Virginia.

Jan. 15 – Baltimore Oriole reported in Newport News.

Jan. 9, 12, 15 and 28. – Mitchell Byrd reported a Snowy Owl at Craney Island on Jan. 9 and on each of those additional dates someone followed up on his report and also found the owl. It may still be there, as the Snowy Owl up on the Chesapeake last year was observed for several months.

## RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRDS

After several reports of *Selasphorus* Hummingbirds from around Virginia in the past few years and again in November and early December of this year, one showed up in Williamsburg for the Christmas Count and was observed by Bill Williams. Then at the end of December another arrived in Tom Armour's backyard. At last report (Feb. 3) it was still there using the hummer feeder and feeding on blooming mahonia bushes.



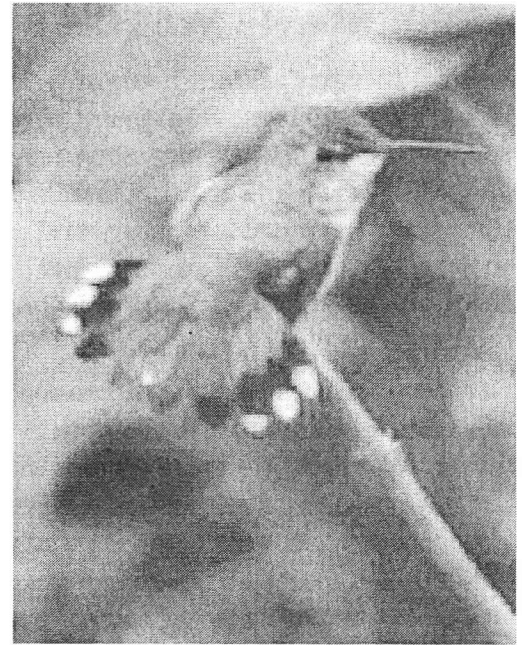
On January 26 this bird went from being a *Selasphorus* Hummingbird species to a Rufous Hummingbird when it was captured, banded and positively identified while hand held by Mary Gustafson. Positive identification is made from the tail

feathers. It was a first year female Rufous Hummingbird. On the same day that Tom's bird was banded, Mary banded two others over near Lake Powell. They were also first year female Rufous Hummingbirds.

Mary Gustafson has banded several of these birds in Virginia, all of which have turned out to be Rufous Hummingbirds. Mary hails from Maryland in the greater Washington D.C. area.

Tom says that the process is most interesting to watch. Mary has a very fine wire cage about 18 inches square and about 24 inches high with a

door in one side. She hangs the feeder inside the cage, props the door open and moves about twenty feet away holding a monofilament line attached to the door. When the bird enters she pulls the



door closed and lifts the bird out by hand. After examining the tail feathers, she inserts the bird into an old nylon stocking and then gently eases the feet out from the end and places a tiny aluminum band printed with a serial number on that very tiny leg. She then inserts the bird's bill into the feeder and it does drink. Finally she releases it. Tom said that the bird returned to the feeder that afternoon but then disappeared for five days. Happily, it returned on February 2.

This was not Tom's first experience with rufous species birds. In 1983 one was seen off and on for the month of January on Godwin Street and Tom photographed it. The photo was published by American Birds. In mid-March there was a report of what was probably a rufous on Burns Lane and Tom Armour also got a look at that one. In June there was another report from Godwin Street that sounded like the same bird seen in January. In May 1993 possible rufous birds were seen in First Colony and in Kingsmill. Then there were no reports until Dec. 2001. The recent bandings were the only positive identifications of the Rufous Hummingbird in this area. (P.S. The editor got to watch this bird through Tom's scope on February 3 and added it to his life list.)

(P.P.S. Tom says that the Lake Powell man says that he will never have another bird banded. One of his Rufous Hummingbirds had become tame enough to perch on the man's finger. Since the banding the bird will not come anywhere near him!.)

## TABER HAWK WATCH BEGINS

Brian Taber has maintained a spring and fall hawk watch for the past several years with the results reported to the Hawk Maintenance Association of North America which collects data from all over the country. He welcomes any and all volunteers who would like to participate in this activity and Brian says that you don't have to be an expert to be helpful.

Brian has found that many northbound and southbound hawks use a broad path that crosses the James River in a line running from where College Creek enters the James River to Hog Island on the south bank. Brian spends as many lunch hours as possible and some weekends either sitting in his car or in a beach chair on the wide sandy area near the river from February 9 until mid-March and then again in the fall. He is there from about 11:30 to 12:30. If you would like to participate or learn more about this call Brian at 253-1181 or stop by his watching post some day.

## GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT IS FEBRUARY 5-18.

The Audubon Society and Cornell University have just announced these dates and invite the widest participation possible. The purpose is to get a mid-winter snapshot of where the birds are and, as data accumulate, to measure changes in the bird population distribution.

Participation is quite simple. Just count the numbers and kinds of birds that you see in your backyard, local park, wildlife refuge or other area and send them through the Bird Source website at [www.birdsource.org](http://www.birdsource.org). Report the species, the largest number that you saw at any one time to avoid repeat counts, include the postal zip of the area observed and the hours of the day that you spent observing. Keep a separate record for each day that you participate. No minimum hours or number of days are specified.

If you don't have access to a computer, Wild Birds Unlimited or the library will file your report. So will Bill Holcombe if you phone or mail the information to him at 4705 Lady Slipper Path, Williamsburg, VA 23188 or 229-8057.

If you've never done this it really is a fun thing to

do and to know that there is real value to the exercise.

## CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD SEEN IN NORTH CAROLINA

*(Yes, there is a lot in this issue about hummingbirds but the unusual disbursement of these birds is just about the hottest birding thing happening right now in the southeast. The story is taken from an article in the N.C. Danville Register and Bee, Jan. 9, 2002 that Tom Armour received.)*

Hopefully, Tom Armour's experience with the Rufous Hummingbird just might parallel the experience of Charlie and Ann Williams in Buena Vistas, N.C. Three years ago the Williams had a Rufous Hummingbird spend the winter with them. On December 15 last year, an even stranger hummingbird took up residence. This is a Calliope Hummingbird, the smallest breeding bird in North America. Susan Campbell of the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences, who banded and identified the bird, said it is only the sixth such bird ever spotted in North Carolina and the first in Forsyth County. The Calliope weighs only one tenth of an ounce and measures just three inches. The species normally spends summers in the Northwest, even traveling as far north as Alaska, and winters in Mexico. "We don't know how or why it got here," said Ms. Campbell, "but it has the capacity to survive winter without a problem." She pointed out that Calliope breed in the high elevations of the Rocky Mountains and are accustomed to adverse weather conditions.

The number of hummingbirds wintering in the southeast has risen dramatically since the mid-1980s. However, tracking them didn't start in North Carolina until 1995, so it is difficult to understand what has prompted this sudden influx. "Contrary to one popular belief," Ms. Campbell said, "hanging feeders through the winter does not encourage hummingbirds to spend the winter at the risk of their health. The birds are smart enough to know when it is time to move on."

The Williams are happy to have another hummer to coddle through the winter. "We spent from 7:15 to 5 p.m. staring out the window the day after it arrived," Charlie Williams said, "I thought that my eyeballs would pop out!" He said that he used

17 pounds of sugar to feed his first wintering  
hummer whom he calls “Miss Rufous.”

Brian Taber is working to collect data on the  
history of the Rufous Hummingbird in Virginia  
and at this point has tabulated some 60 reports  
that are heavily weighted to the past few years.

*(Tom, we hope that history repeats itself and that  
your next resident hummingbird will be a  
Calliope. Ed.)*