



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 27, Number 1

January 2003

NEXT MEETING JANUARY 15

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club is scheduled for 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, January 15 in Room 117 of Millington Hall, William and Mary campus. After inviting and introducing speakers for a couple of years, Dan Cristol will take the floor himself. Dr. Cristol will discuss the 35 breeding species in Virginia that are on the endangered, threatened or special concern list. He will discuss the conditions which have led to this situation and get us all involved in just what WE can do to help the situation.

FIELD TRIPS FOR 2003

Saturday January 18 – Tom Armour's first choice will be a trip to the Bay-Bridge Tunnel Islands and from there to the Eastern Shore. However, because adverse winter weather along the coast may make such trip extremely difficult, a shorter, tough weather alternative will be the York River Parkway. We will meet in the Colony Shopping Center by the Fresh Market on Jamestown Road and be ready to leave by 7:30 a.m. On the Bay-Bridge Tunnel Islands there are opportunities to see some of the winter sea ducks, Great Cormorants, Purple Sandpipers, Scoters and, this time of year, whatever strange sea birds happen by. Of course there are no guarantees in birding.

Tom has put together a good selection of trips for the rest of the year and here is his present plan:

February 22 – Hog Island.

March 22 – The Vineyards.

April 19 – The Great Dismal Swamp.

May 24 – York River State Park.

June – We assume that the bird walk will be part of the annual picnic.

July – No Field Trip.

August – Craney Island.

September 20 – Kiptopeke.

October 18 – Jamestown Island.

November 22 – Newport News Park.

December 14 – Christmas Bird Count.

IT'S DUES TIME AGAIN

An envelope is enclosed for mailing your 2003 dues to Chuck Rend, our treasurer. Note once more that there has been no increase. Generous members, "patrons," have made this possible by voluntarily paying \$25 for their memberships.

NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP

(Sorry we missed this one last month.)

Tom Armour led the trip along the York River on a cold and windy day, but the group found some good birds. At Yorktown near the bridge there were two Red-throated Loons and ten Common Loons. Farther up the river were two Pied-billed Grebes and six Horned Grebes. Fishing over the river were six Northern Gannets and ten Brown Pelicans. Ducks on the river included Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Buffleheads and Ruddy Ducks. Also notable were the Bonaparte's Gulls, 50 Forster's Terns, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier and a Red-tailed Hawk.

BIRD COUNT CORRECTIONS

After the chart of results was issued in the

December *Flyer* two more birds were added to the counts. Bill Williams reported that his neighbor, who had the Rufous Hummingbird on his feeder last winter and had it banded and positively identified, had another one return. In early December the banders returned, captured the bird and found that it was the very same bird that they had banded there a year ago! That bird was on the feeder December 15 and was within the Middle Plantation section of the count. It is now part of our official record.

When Brian Taber saw the *Flyer* report he wondered why the Gray Catbird seen on Hog Island was not included. Turns out that they mistakenly missed the catbird in the compiling session. So our species count improves from 108 to 110, a very respectable figure indeed.

The count was also able to offer some assistance to one of Mitchell Bird's projects. He had planned to mount a camera where it could record the spring nesting activity in the Kingsmill Bald Eagle nest. But as the eagles had not been seen recently in the nest, there was uncertainty about the continuity of the birds there. On December 15 a pair of adult Bald Eagles were observed in the nest by scope for 15 minutes or so by three Christmas Count birders. That provided incentive to continue the project.

FIELD NOTES FOR DECEMBER

While the Christmas Bird Count report offers a comprehensive picture of the birds in our area last month, there are some other interesting observations:

Shortly after Christmas there were several reports of Hermit Thrushes visiting backyards from John McDowell, Caroline Lowe and by Bill Holcombe, who saw the thrushes almost daily for a week after Christmas. And Tom Armour called as this is being written to report a Hermit Thrush in his new back yard.

Alex Minarik totaled up her year of bird sightings and came up with an astounding 73 species on her yard-bird list. She has started working on her 2003 list on New Years day with 19 birds, including Wild Turkeys and a Cooper's Hawk!

That 2002 list of 73 included Red-shouldered

Hawk, Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Hermit Thrush and Fox Sparrow, Wild Turkeys, six woodpecker species, Baltimore Oriole in February, twelve warblers (Northern Parula, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped, Yellow-throated, Pine, Blackpoll, Black and White, Redstart, Prothonotary, Ovenbird, and Louisiana Waterthrush.) We'd all love a backyard like that but without Alex's great ears and eyes we might never see all of those birds! Alex's record for 2002 in the state of Virginia was 207 species.

Grace and Joe Doyle walked Camp Peary on three Sundays in December. Their better birds included Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Phoebe, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Rufous-sided Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, and Brown-headed Cowbird.

BIRDING VIA VA-BIRD

(Virginia-Bird is an e-mail service managed by the Virginia Society of Ornithologists.)

Nov.30 – Mary Gustafson bands another Rufous Hummingbird in Arlington.

Dec.14 – Rough-legged Hawk in Fauquier County. White Pelican at Back Bay in Virginia Beach.

Dec.15 – Mary Gustafson bands another Rufous Hummingbird at Cape Charles.

Dec. 16 – A Merlin is spotted in Richmond.

Dec. 17 – A California Gull and a Glaucous Gull seen at Prince William County landfill. They were also seen on the 20th. A first winter Icelandic Gull spotted the 19th.

Dec. 19 – An adult Mew Gull (formerly the Short-billed Gull) on CBBT Island 4. This was the 342 Virginia species for Todd Day this year.

Dec. 20 – A California Gull spotted at the

Fauquier County landfill near Warrenton.

Dec. 21 – A Merlin seen in Loudon County. A Eurasian Widgeon and a White-fronted Goose seen in Fauquier County.

Dec. 22 – Eurasian Widgeon on lake at Christopher's Farm, Virginia Beach.

Dec. 23 – 46 American Woodcock east of Cape Charles at dusk. Male Baltimore Oriole on a feeder there. California Gull in Fairfax County. Merlin and American Pipit in Buchanan City Park.

Dec. 25 – California Gull and Nelson's Gull on CBBT.

Dec. 26 – 21 American Pipits at Fort Belvoir.

Dec. 30 – Thayer's Gull on-CBBT Island. Four 4 American Oyster Catchers on Island 1.

Dec. 31 – Clark's Grebe found at Fort Story. Seen next day along with a Red-necked Grebe.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Water Pipit by Bill Holcombe

Bill Williams has reported Water Pipits on the Mainland farm, Tom McCarey has reported them down on Route 5 and they are mentioned a couple of times in the Virginia roundup. So maybe this is a good time to take a closer look at them.

The worldwide pipit family is composed of 54 species eight of which are reported in North America. *Motacillidae*, the Latin name for the family, means "wag-tail" from the habit of many in the family that pump their tails up and down. They are all sparrow sized birds with thin, pointed bills and long-clawed feet. They are basically ground dwelling birds that walk or run quickly but don't hop about as so many small birds do. Their name reflects their twittering voices. These very vocal birds call a lot, even in flight. Most are migratory.

The Water Pipit summers in North America on the treeless mountain tops or tundra of the Arctic-Alpine zone, that reaches from the barren coast of Labrador across the arctic tundra north to Alaska and south to the Rocky Mountains. Sexes are outwardly alike. Both are plain gray-brown above and buffy below with streaking. The outer tail feathers are white.

When walking the tail is often swung from side to side with each step and the head bobs up and down much like a walking dove. The slender body and thin, pointed bill distinguish it from sparrows and longspurs. During courtship, the Water Pipit has a spectacular display in which, after flying straight up into the air to 150-200 feet, it flutters back to earth singing excitedly.

These birds frequently winter on the lowlands, valleys and prairies near the mountains from where they also fly in enormous flocks south into Mexico. They also winter along the ice-free coasts of North America and are found in the interior from Oregon, Utah and Nevada, through Arkansas, Tennessee, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and along the Atlantic coast from Maryland south. In the summer they nest from Alaska and the Aleutians, northern Canada and Western Greenland south to Western Mountain tops and along the coast of Labrador to the Gaspé Peninsula and into the mountains of Maine.

Nests lie on the ground in the shelter of banks, rocks or tussocks and are primitive combinations of dried grass and twigs. Sometimes they are just scrapes in the ground. Nests are built by the female. She lays four to six eggs and does all of the incubation, as the male has no brood patches, and cool mountain temperatures need this adaptation. Incubation averages 14 days. In another 14 to 15 days the brood fledges.

During the summer nesting season their diet is made up largely of insects and worms. After migrating to wintering grounds, the birds subsist largely on a seed diet.

Locally, these birds have been seen along the Colonial Parkway, in fields at Hog Island and on the Mainland Farm near the Greensprings Nature Trail. I wish I knew where our winter residents come from but I don't have that information.

Reference: The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds by John K. Terres