



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 27, Number 10

November 2003

NEXT MEETING

Please Note: We will NOT meet in our usual Room 117 in Millington Hall. We will meet in Room 211 Millington Hall which is directly above our usual meeting room – one floor up.

The meeting will start at 7:30 on Wednesday, November 19 in Millington Hall on the campus of William and Mary. Tom McCary has arranged for Mr. Mack Walls, District Biologist for the Hog Island Wild Life Management Area to present a program, "Birding Hog Island." Come and learn how to get more out of your trips to this wonderful birding location.

TWO GOLDEN EAGLES SEEN ON OCTOBER FIELD TRIP!

The October field trip to the eastern shore featured great weather and some very special birds. The clear highlight were the two Golden Eagles which, while not unknown in these parts, are very few and far between. A White-crowned Sparrow, another stranger to these parts, was also seen, along with a lot of Sharp-shinned hawks, Cooper's Hawks and Bald Eagles. Two views of the Cooper's and a Red-Tail Hawk were virtually eye-ball to eye-ball as they were lifted from traps and held by the handlers. (Tom Armour said that they did not look too happy!) A total of 43 species was counted. Enjoying this trip led by Tom Armour were Ron and Bobby Geise, Carolyn Lowe, Eleanor Young and Jeanne Armour, plus the lab, Elsa.

NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP SEEKS WATER FOWL ON YORK RIVER

Tom Armour leads the next field trip on Saturday, November 22 to the Colonial Parkway along the York River. Grace and Joe Doyle who regularly bird Camp Peary have already seen large rafts of Ruddy Ducks and other water fowl arriving steadily from the Canadian far north. Weather and wind can affect our ability to find these birds, but the prospects should be very good.

The group will assemble in the Colony Shopping Center above the Fresh Market and be ready to leave by 8 a.m. We don't have very far to go and the ducks don't disappear in mid morning as the song birds do.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE OFFERS SLATE FOR 2004

The nominating committee of Ruth Beck, Lee Schuster and Marilyn Zeigler has obtained an excellent slate of candidates for 2004 and will offer the group for election at the November meeting.

This list of candidates is::

President – Alex Minarik

Vice-Pres. Programs – Tom McCary

Vice-Pres. & Co-editor, *Flyer* – Phil Young

Vice-Pres. & Co-editor, *Flyer* – Shirley Devan

Secretary – David and Carroll Goff

Treasurer – Charles Rend

Trustee-at-large – Emedio Bracalente

Trustee-at-large – Dianna Knowland Mellon

FIELD NOTES FOR OCTOBER

While the fall migration may not yet be complete, many arrivals were reported during the past month. Highlight of those arrivals is the Rufous Hummingbird first reported and banded in 2001 that has again returned to the same feeder off Jamestown Road.

Sept. 27 – Bill Williams reports “a beautiful Sedge Wren at Mainland Farm.”

October 12 – Grace and Joe Doyle see a flock of 25-30 Eastern Meadowlarks at Camp Peary, the largest flock that they have ever encountered.

October 18 – Ruth Beck spots her first White-throated Sparrow.

October 24 – Alex Minarik says that “the cold front brought a Gold-crowned Kinglet, two Hermit Thrushes, a Brown Creeper and a flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers to my yard.”

October 24 – Ruth Beck has a good day and finds a Brown Creeper and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

October 25 – Another good day for Ruth spotting her first Ruby-crowned Kinglet and a Dark-eyed Junco. Also this day, Bill Holcombe has dark-eyed Junco in his yard.

October 27 – Tom Armour sees a flock of ten Eastern Meadowlarks and a Savannah Sparrow at the airport.

October 27 – Ruth finds a late Osprey circling her pond. She also says that adult Bald Eagles have been over that pond daily.

October 28 – Tom Armour sees his first fall Pied-billed Grebe and Coot at the Kingsmill Marina.

FALL MIGRATION IN THE REST OF VIRGINIA

(Sampled from the Virginia Society of Ornithologist email Birdlist.)

October 9 – Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in South Boston.

October 10 – Orange-crowned Warbler at Dyke Marsh and a Franklin's Gull at the Prince William County Landfill.

October 11 – At the Blandy Experimental Farm in Clark County, Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Gold and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Juncos, White-

throated Sparrows and Savannah Sparrows.

Near Winchester an interesting mix of fall and summer: Wood Duck, Am. Widgeon, Green-winged Teal, Sora, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Magnolia Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler and Palm Warbler.

Augusta County, near Stuart Draft, has Sedge Wren, Connecticut Warbler and Lincoln Sparrow.

October 12 – First Snow Goose at Accolink Bay Wildlife Refuge. Report from King William County includes Snipe, Gadwall, Am. Widgeon, Wood Duck, Indigo Bunting, Cedar Waxwings, Black and White Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Parula and Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Gloucester County observer finds a Black-headed Grosbeak last seen there in 1978.

October 13 – From Sky Meadow State Park a report includes Lincoln's Sparrow, Purple Finch, White-throated Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Gold and Ruby-Crowned Kinglets.

October 15 – Horned Grebe in Augusta County.

October 16 – Kiptopeke reports its first Rough-legged Hawk seen this year.

October 17 – Observer finds female Common Eider duck at Island Four of the CBBT and White-crowned Sparrows and both kinglets at Kiptopeke.

October 19 – Great Falls has the first fall report of a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

October 20 – A nine-sparrow day at Manassas Battlefield turned up these sparrows: Swamp, Field, Song, Lincoln, White-throated, White-crowned and “the first Fox Sparrow this fall.”

In Orange County “The second ever Sandhill Crane, plus these first of the fall birds: Purple Finch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Swamp Sparrow and Red-breasted Nuthatch.”

October 21 – At Huntley Meadows, a Merlin and a Cattle Egret.

October 23 – At Kiptopeke: Bicknell's Thrush (banded), Purple Finch, Clay-colored Sparrow, Cape May Warbler, Veery, Wood Thrush, American Bittern and “many Blue-headed Vireos.”

October 25 – Staunton fall sightings: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Gold and Ruby-crowned

Kinglets, Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco.

October 26 – A late Red-eyed Vireo at Great Falls.

October 27 – Clay-colored Sparrow in Norfolk.

FALL HAWK WATCH COUNT FROM KIPTOPEKE

Year-to-date figures from the Kiptopeke fall hawk watch as of October 29:

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Black Vultures | 234 |
| Turkey Vultures | 717 |
| Osprey | 1392 |
| Bald Eagle | 135 |
| Northern Harrier | 587 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | 5235 |
| Cooper's Hawk | 1432 |
| Red-shouldered Hawk | 4 |
| Swainson's Hawk | 1 |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 131 |
| Rough-legged Hawk | 1 |
| Gold Eagle | 3 |
| American Kestrel | 3168 |
| Merlin | 1434 |
| Peregrine Falcon | 466 |

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 12/16

If you've never gotten hooked on the Christmas Bird Count, maybe you should give it a try. And if you tried it and found that it was sometimes called on Sunday the 24th, you should now know that will never happen again. The schedule has been broadened, permitting us to always schedule it for the SECOND Sunday before Christmas, unless Christmas falls on a Sunday. In that case we will schedule THE Sunday before Christmas.

To review the mechanics:

Circular territories with 15-mile diameters have been assigned by Audubon. Our circle centers on the Colonial Williamsburg Reception Center.

It is divided into nine territories and each has a director.

Directors start birding at 7 a.m. and usually have the territory covered by 4 – 4:30 with a lunch break in the middle. Some coordinators start owling about 5 a.m. but they will not expect you to join them for that.

Directors record results and bring or send those results to a 5 p.m. meeting in a conference room around the corner from Ruth Beck's office in Millington Hall. The results are combined into a single report which is filed with Audubon by the compiler via computer.

If you want to participate you can plan to bird for half a day or a full day. You call one of the directors listed below and arrange when and where you will meet him. You bring binoculars, a lunch and something to drink. Weather has ranged from very cold to unseasonably warm, so you dress accordingly. A portion of every territory is covered by car so you don't have to carry lunch around and you have a place to leave a heavy coat if it warms up. To be listed as a participant in this event you are required to contribute \$5 to the Audubon Society towards their costs. Your territory director will collect that.

Why do so many of us never miss this event? It provides an opportunity to spend a day in the field at a time that we don't frequently do. The ticks and chiggers are gone. There always seem to be some surprises, with some late summer birds still hanging around and some migrating birds that have wandered afield. This will be the 104th count year that the data have been collected, centralized and processed. If you believe that the health of our bird population is important, making a contribution to the count is certainly worth doing.

The nine Territories are:

1. Camp Peary — Director Tom Armour, but participation is limited by Camp Peary.
2. Cheatham Annex — Director Bill Williams, but this base has similar security problems.
3. College Woods — Director Ruth Beck, phone home, 566-8234 or college.
4. Hog Island — Director Brian Taber, phone home 253-1181, work 259-3123.
5. Jamestown Island — Director Dot Silsby, phone 596-3252
6. Jolly Pond — Director Lee Schuster, 565-6148
7. Kingsmill — Director Paul McAllister, 229-1323
8. Middle Plantation — Hugh Beard, 221-0499
9. Skimino — Bettye Fields, 930-0177

WINTER BIRDING ON THE BAY BRIDGE TUNNEL (CBBT) ISLANDS by Bill Holcomb

Winter birding on the CBBT Islands is another special event for this season. On a line where the bay meets the ocean, it is an exciting place to be. This puts miles of water between you and the mainland, with a big uninterrupted dome of sky. The water is usually a deep blue-green and the waves around the islands are a very bright white.

You may be able to find birds there that can be found at other places on the bay but none of the others is seen in such a dramatic setting. Many of us will find these birds only on the CBBT. They can be dramatically different looking birds such as the Common Eider or, less frequently the even more dramatic looking King Eider. Then there is the Harlequin Duck, perhaps the most dramatically colored duck of all when in breeding plumage. The bird now called Long-tailed Duck, was only recently called the more colorful name of Old Squaw. It is different from any of our locally seen ducks. While duck-like, the scoters are again something out of our ordinary. There are three species, the Surf Scoter, the Black Scoter and the White-winged Scoter. The first two are quite common around the winter islands but you often have to work to pick out the White-winged Scoter. The Surf Scoters and Black Scoters are frequently present in large rafts of birds sitting on the surface. When the raft is largely made up of Black Scoters you sometimes hear the weird, wailing sound that comes from the accumulation of individual bird's plaintive whistled "*creee*."

The Double-crested Cormorant is very, very common in our area but its cousin, the Great Cormorant, is rather rare. This cousin is quite common on the winter islands. Likewise, while sandpipers are all over our beaches and shore lines, you are not very likely to find the Purple Sandpiper there. They are quite common on the CBBT even though there are days when they keep well hidden in the rocks.

You can also find many of the ducks that we enjoy on our rivers at the CBBT. Both the Greater and the Lesser Scaup, the Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers, Bufflehead, Goldeneye and scattered Redheads are often reported.

Gulls abound in large numbers and are largely a mix of Ringbills, Great Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls, but the patient scanner has frequently found a distant visitor in the mix. (We were there once when one of those careful scanners found a rare Black-tailed Gull and we all got good well-focused views of

the bird.)

The CBBT Islands are also on the ocean front migration route and at one time or another probably most of the shore birds have been reported there. There is an amazing number of song birds too. A visit here in December or January is usually rewarding but there are no guarantees in birding. While you can sometimes get amazingly close looks at these birds off of the rocks, a scope makes the visit far more productive. And on cold winter days a thermos of coffee adds a nice touch.

To bird these islands you need a letter of authorization. The letters are easily obtainable and are good for the entire calendar year in which they are issued. You can request a letter of permission by calling the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and Tunnel District at 757-331-2960 and explaining that you want permission to bird the islands. They will take the necessary information and quickly mail you a letter. There are four islands and normally you can bird all four of them. Hurricane damage interrupted this policy for a while but it is my understanding that all but one of the islands are now open.

Upon arriving at the entrance you park in the lot in back of the office. Then take your letter, driver's license and car registration to the office. They will copy your papers and send you on your way. You'll still pay the \$10 toll at the entrance booth but if you bird the islands and turn back without exiting at the northern end you will not have to pay a return fee. You must follow this procedure each time you bird the islands.

On a crisp winter day, if you are dressed for the wind and the cold, this can be a very exhilarating experience. It is only an hour and a half away.