



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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Website: www.wmbgbirdclub.com

December 2005

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Bob Long

Thanks to Alex Minarik for her enthusiasm and expertise as a birder and club president. She will be a tough act to follow. Remember to identify yourself as a member of the Williamsburg Bird Club when you purchase products at Wild Birds Unlimited. George Copping generously donates a portion of each purchase to the club treasury. Also remember our Christmas Count Sunday, December 18, 2005. I'm looking forward to a great birding 2006 — Happy Holidays!

2006 WBC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

At the November 16 meeting, the club elected a new Board of Directors for 2006. The following Board will serve for one year:

President: Robert (Bob) Long

Secretary: Fred Blystone

Treasurer: Charles Rend

V.P. & Program Chair: Tom McCary

V.P. & Co-Editor of *The Flyer*: Phil Young

V.P. & Co-Editor of *The Flyer*: Shirley Devan

Member-at-Large: Mary Anne Fennell

Member-at-Large: Bill Williams

Welcome to the new Board members, and many thanks to the 2005 Board members for their service, dedication and time.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DECEMBER 18

NEW THIS YEAR! New Quarter Park will be part of our Club's Christmas Bird Count Circle! According to Bill Williams, who has been responsible for the Cheatham Annex sector since the count began, this is the first year the park has been available to us for the CBC. "The Christmas Bird Count is as successful as the coverage of the areas in the count circle. The more eyes we have in the field that day, the better the count." If you want to celebrate this annual event in New Quarter Park, call Bill Williams at 229-1124 to

get details on where and when to meet.

For those members hooked on this event, the Audubon Christmas Bird Count is one of the Bird Club's most satisfying activities of the year. On Sunday, December 18, Bird Club members will split up into nine groups, take to the field at 7:00 a.m. or earlier and do their best to count every bird that they can identify by sound or sight in their assigned areas.

At 5:00 p.m. the leaders and diehards meet back in the William and Mary Biology Department to compile the day's work into one chart showing the number of species and the number of birds identified. Most of the time our species count ranges between 109 and 112.

If you want to join a group, just pick an area below that you would like to work in and call the leader of that area and find out where and when they will gather to start the day. (Camp Peary unfortunately is limited to a few participants cleared by the security forces there.)

New Quarter Park (including Cheatham Annex), Bill Williams, 229-1124

College Woods, Ruth Beck, 566-8234

Hog Island, Bryan Taber, 253-1181

Jamestown Island, Dot Silsby, 596-3252

Jolly Pond, Lee Schuster, 565-6148

Kingsmill, Paul McAllister, 229-1323

Middle Plantation, Hugh Beard, 221-0499

Skimino, Bettye Fields, 930-0177

You will need a lunch and something to drink.

Early it can sometimes be very cold while warming up as the day goes on. The groups move about by cars so you'll have a place to stash your lunch and layers that you don't need.

This is a truly satisfying event. Call one of the coordinators listed above to sign up for a location you're interested in. TRY IT. YOU'LL LIKE IT!

NEW YEAR'S DAY BIRDING

By Shirley Devan

New Year's Day is one of my favorite holidays. For the past few years, I have celebrated the start

of a new year by spending a few hours birding. Sometimes I go to Jamestown Island. Some years I stay close to home and search out American Kestrels at the WISC park near home.

This year I invite you to celebrate the arrival of 2006 by joining me on the boardwalk at Greensprings Trail New Year's Day between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. (If you're a lister, then you'll be off to a great start because every bird is a first for the year!) Come and go as you please – you don't have to be on time or stay for the full two hours. Bring house guests if they are still hanging around. As long as it's not raining or snowing, I'll be there. I can't promise that I'll know every bird we spot, but I'll have several Field Guides handy and somehow we'll figure out what we're looking at if one of our club experts is not nearby! By 1:00 p.m. we should have slept off our previous night's revels and be ready for fresh air, sunshine, and BIRDS!

WELCOME NEW MEMBER

Inge Curtis is a new member in the last month. Welcome, Inge! We look forward to seeing you soon at the Christmas Bird Count, New Year's Day at Greensprings Trail, and the January 18 meeting. Thanks for joining!

FIELD TRIP NETS 39 SPECIES

By Tom Armour

The weather for our November 19 Club field trip couldn't have been better, not too cold, no wind, and a beautiful blue sky. Thirteen members and guests came out to enjoy the birds and colorful scenery. Thanks to Alex Minarik's and Bill Keith's (a visitor from Virginia Beach) sharp eyes, we found 39 species of birds. Included were 4 species of Sparrows – Savannah, Song, Swamp and White-throated. Bald Eagles again were enjoyed – a pair perched in the bright sun were a treat. Ruddy Ducks, Bufflehead, and Hooded Mergansers were the main waterfowl present. The Brown Pelican numbers were greatly reduced from earlier in the week, probably due to the drop in temperature. Participants were Pat Eaton, Barbra Rockwell, Jeanne Armour, Jane Beavers, (also a visitor from Virginia Beach), Fred Blystone, Charles Rend, Shirley Devan, Mary Anne Fennell, John Fennel, Ron Geise and Roberta Geise.

A TRIBUTE TO DICK MAHONE

By Bill Williams

The rural character and landscape of 1954 greater Williamsburg provided a seemingly endless cornucopia of opportunities for me as a seven year

old aspiring naturalist recently arrived from Hampton. It was during that era that "Mr. Mahone" entered my life through his son, one of my closest friends, John McDaniel. From the moment I was first in Mr. Mahone's presence, I understood what "larger than life" meant. But I also found a mentor, someone who was passionate and knowledgeable about land and the wealth of resources the land offered. His enthusiastic stories about the birds and other wildlife he experienced, especially those encountered on his property above Queens Creek, near his childhood home, were a guiding force in my decision to become a practicing biologist. In no small way was he influential in my growing attention to local birds, an interest he had developed for himself under the tutelage of Williamsburg Presbyterian minister, Dr. John Grey, one of Virginia's most respected ornithologists in the 1950's.

I remember with great fondness "Mr. Mahone's" excitement with having Guinea hens roaming his property, having been put there to control pest insects, he said. I heard his game bird hunting tales, and in later years upon my return to Williamsburg for graduate school, being called to his home to verify that the finely constructed nest outside a bathroom window sill was that of a Red-eyed Vireo. By then I had become chronologically positioned to call this iconic man "Dick." I always knew spring was near when Dick would call late one night to ask for help with the Early Risers Bird Walk he organized the for the annual Williamsburg Garden Symposium for more than 20 years. His true love for this event, however, was not the birds but the boxwood, varieties of which he cherished and educated everyone he could.

Dick was president of the Williamsburg Bird Club in 1992, and was a regular at club meetings and local field trips. Throughout my life I knew Dick as a father figure, a boss at Colonial Williamsburg's Landscape Department, and a dear family friend and mentor. I stand in a long line of local folks who respected and admired all he did for his community, church, family and the environment. Dick passed away peacefully on October 16, 2005 with his family by his side. I have no doubt he and a local navy captain the bird club holds in great reverence, Bill Sheehan, are beating about, sharing tall tales, as they tend boxwood gardens bustling with all manner of terrific birds.

NOVEMBER BIRD SIGHTINGS

Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Shirley Devan at 220-6269 (home phone) or sedevan52@cox.net (home email). If you encounter interesting birds on your vacation or travels, please share!

November 1: Dorothy Whitfield reports three Dark-eyed Juncos (2 male and 1 female) on her abelia shrub just outside her living room window, reaching toward the end of the branches for dried-up blossoms. Also, with the juncos, an Eastern Towhee that flitted several times down to the bird bath a few feet away. Also, on November 9, 12, and 14 three juncos on the abelia shrub.

November 1: Shirley Devan reports one each of an American Coot and a Ruddy Duck in the green muck of the swamp left of the entrance road to the WISC complex just off Longhill Road.

November 2: Alex Minarik reports a Hermit Thrush eating dogwood berries.

November 3: Ariel White, W&M Grad Student and recipient of one of the Sheehan Ornithology Grants this year, reports: The opening week of Saw-whet Owl netting on the Eastern Shore has been an exciting and interesting week! The saw-whets have been on a slow but steady move through the area – peaking on cooler nights, and blanking on warmer nights. From October 27 through November 2, we netted 11 new Saw-whet Owls and 1 recapture. Also caught this week were 2 woodcock, and a Northern Flying squirrel.

November 4: Alex Minarik reports first Dark-eyed Junco and Winter Wren of the season.

November 6: Joe and Grace Doyle report 21 species on their weekly tour of Camp Peary. The highlight was Eastern Meadowlarks at the airport. Other notables: Ruddy Ducks, Bald Eagle, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gulls, Belted Kingfisher, Northern Flicker, Eastern Bluebirds, Pine Warbler, White-throated Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Red-winged Blackbird and American Goldfinch.

November 6: Eleanor Young reports that a large crowd ventured out for the bird walk at Newport News Park on a beautiful, cool Sunday morning. The group spotted the following: Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Robins, Crows, Grackles, Mallards, Great Blue Herons, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Red-breasted Nuthatches, American Goldfinches, Eastern Bluebirds, House Finches, Purple Finches, Blue Jays, Green Heron, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Downy Woodpecker, Dark-eyed Juncos, Carolina Chickadees, Red-wing Blackbirds, Northern Cardinals, Osprey, White-throated Warbler, Red-headed Woodpecker and Tufted Titmouse.

November 6: Shirley Devan reports a Red-tailed Hawk at Longhill Swamp next to the Christian Life Center. Also, “Eastern Bluebirds and Belted Kingfisher. The Ruddy Duck and American Coot were still in the green muck of the swamp left of the entrance road to the WISC as well as a Great Blue Heron. In the pond behind the WISC building, a Ring-necked Duck and Great Blue

Heron were enjoying the warm sunny afternoon.”

November 9: Tom McCary reports 12 – 15 Eastern Meadowlarks in a field a Shirley Plantation.

November 10: Phil Young reports a Hooded Merganser on College Creek.

November 11: Tom McCary reports a Red-shouldered Hawk in a pine tree in the lot behind his house.

November 13: Joe and Grace Doyle report 25 species on their weekly trip to Camp Peary. The highlights were the first Hooded Mergansers of the season. Other sightings include Great Blue Heron, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Mallard, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker and Song Sparrow.

November 13: Tom McCary reports a Great Horned Owl calling in the evening in his neighborhood.

November 13: Bill Williams reports: at the Greensprings Trail there was 1 Vesper Sparrow and 1 Fox Sparrow.

November 13: Alex Minarik spotted a Common Loon on the York River at Yorktown.

November 14: Dorothy Whitfield reports a Pileated Woodpecker in the late afternoon about a foot from the top of a dead tree on the far side of her driveway. She had heard it recently in the woods but the leaves were too thick to see it.

November 15: Dorothy Whitfield sees and hears a very vocal Pileated Woodpecker in her backyard woods late in the afternoon.

November 16: Mike Pierson reports 69 Brown Pelicans on the York River near the Coleman Bridge around noon.

November 18: Tom McCary reports many American Robins in his yard and his neighbors’.

November 20: Joe and Grace Doyle report 40 species on their weekly visit to Camp Peary. Highlights were: Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Tundra Swan, Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Mockingbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Song Sparrow and American Goldfinch.

November 20: Shirley Devan reports 3 crows harassing a Red-tailed Hawk over Lafayette Street near the Williamsburg Shopping Center. Later at Freedom Park, near the Botanical Demonstration Garden, she found many American Robins, three Cedar Waxwings, a Chipping Sparrow, Northern Cardinals, Chickadees and Dark-eyed Juncos.

November 20: Tom McCary reports an adult Bald Eagle on a bare tree by James River near the big house at Shirley Plantation.

November 22: Shirley Devan reports from outside her breakfast area: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush and Dark-eyed Junco.

November 22: Alex Minarik reports a Hairy Woodpecker and a Pine Warbler at her suet log feeder.

November 25: Tom McCary reports one adult and one immature White-crowned Sparrow foraging in the gardens at Shirley Plantation.

November 26: Tom Armour reports: "this p.m. on The Vineyards pond, 2 Buffleheads and nearby a Red-shouldered Hawk."

November 26: Tom McCary reports three Eastern Bluebirds in his yard. They appear to enjoy sap from the butternut tree. "First bluebirds I've seen in my yard in years," per Tom.

November 27: Bill Williams reports: "A Purple Finch, and ... Just under the wire for the month was an adult LeConte's Sparrow at Mainland Farm on 27 November. This is the third local record for this sparrow. The first was on 29 October 1992 at Drummond's Field, less than 400 meters from this current sighting. The second record was 19 January 1993 at College Creek."

November 28: Shirley Devan reports 4 Ring-necked Ducks on the pond behind the WISC center near Longhill Road and Lafayette High.

November 29: Tom Armour reports: "today at the Vineyards pond the 1st Scaup of the winter – looks like it may be a Greater Scaup. I hope some one can confirm the species."

November 30: Fred Blystone reports from Jamestown Island: "This morning I went out to Jamestown Island to enjoy the day and to do some birding. I didn't go on the loop road, just spent time around the settlement. I don't think I have ever seen as many Cedar Waxwings (in addition to the large number of Robins). On my way back over the footbridge I stopped to bird, and when I looked down I found a Virginia Rail about 4 feet below me. I watched it for about 2 minutes until it went under the bridge. I know I have never had such a good look at this bird before."

CHILL WINDS By Tom McCary

What a difference a day makes! Mild weather on the 16th of November abruptly disappeared that evening with the arrival of a cold front which sent temperatures plummeting.

Nowhere was the shift more evident than along the banks of the James River at Shirley Plantation where I braved the chill winds to ramble through the formal gardens to see what feathered creatures

might have flown in. I was pretty quickly rewarded. Juncos were everywhere, bringing to mind the old saying that the gray backs betoken the dark skies of winter and the white bellies the snow beneath. From time to time I heard the plaintive whistle of the White-throated Sparrow, but I saw only two individuals. A big-eyed Ruby-crowned Kinglet performed acrobatics in one of the hedges. The warbler tribe was represented by a colorful Pine Warbler, his yellow breast appearing like a spring daffodil midst the somber green foliage.

Year-long residents mingled with recent arrivals. Officious in manner, a Northern Mockingbird would occasionally fly in, appearing to take charge in his sober uniform of white and gray. Vying for the position of bird-in-chief was the brassy Blue Jay, resplendent in his dress blues. In contrast, a female Northern Cardinal seemed uncharacteristically demure. Woodpeckers observed were the resident Red-bellied and the winter guest, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

Of all the glorious birds seen, perhaps my favorite was the White-crowned Sparrow. What skilled milliner could create such a wondrous bonnet! Every winter I have been at Shirley I have been blessed to watch these dapper birds. In addition to a handsome adult I enjoyed seeing an immature, his crown attired in stripes of buff and dark red-brown.

'Twas a cold wind indeed that blew that day, but what a marvelous variety of birds came out to greet it. Each season brings its own marvels, warming the heart of the observer, no matter how gelid the gales, how fierce the cold.

NOVEMBER 8 AT KIPTOPEKE BANDING STATION

By Jethro Runco

Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory

Boy, if today was not one of the most exciting days in the history of the Kiptopeke banding station! At 11 am we netted and banded a MacGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER!! This is the first record of this species in Virginia! It was a hatching year bird of unknown sex and was quite healthy. The bird was caught in one of the nets close to our brush pile. This bird displayed the bright half eye crescents, full hood of gray and long tail, marking it as a MacGillivray's. The bird was banded and released unharmed and last seen north of the banding station.

On the third day of banding this season (17 Aug) we caught a Cerulean Warbler (the station's 4th ever). At that point, I thought that was going to be the best bird of the season! Then a month later we caught the station's first ever Green Heron! Then

a month after that, we caught the third ever Rusty Blackbird. Now a few weeks later we caught the station's and the STATE'S first ever MacGillivray's Warbler! Does it really get any better than this!?

FLORIDA WETLANDS IN WINTER

By Linda Sherer

Today was too dismal to go to the beach, so I took myself over to Wakodahatchee Wetlands to check out the storm damage and the birds, of course. The place looks quite bedruggled, but most of the usual birds were there. All of the Great Blue Heron and Anhinga nests were blown away, but the Anhingas are perching all over their usual nest trees, and there were at least four great blues hanging out in the vicinity of their old nests. I hope they will begin rebuilding soon. I could only spend about an hour there, but managed to see most everything I expected at this time of year.

Wakodahatchee is a wetlands area created by the Palm Beach (Florida) County Water Utilities Department. It's located in Delray Beach. Here's the website: www.pbcwater.com/wakodahatchee.

Wakodahatchee has become a favorite spot for "close-up" birding in this area. There's a 1/2 mile boardwalk, with a couple of covered seating areas. It's also popular with folks wanting a good view of alligators and with locals who use it for their daily exercise walks. When I was there recently, a couple of people were standing about three feet from a lovely female Anhinga perched on the sign that illustrates the various herons and egrets. These folks were not birders and were trying to figure out which heron they were viewing. (The webbed feet hanging over the edge of the sign didn't give them a clue.) They seemed pleased to be enlightened about Anhingas. The Tricolored Herons often perch on the railings and are quite indignant when we walk by and they feel obliged to move.

BACKYARD HABITAT

By Cynthia Long

A Northern Cardinal in a holly tree welcomed our travel weary family to Virginia more than 30 years ago. I'll never forget our excitement at this new discovery on Jamestown Island. Later a California friend said when he spotted his first cardinal here, "I never believed that bird really existed! I thought it was a figment of Roger Tory Peterson's imagination." It is truly a Christmas card brought to life. For years I boxed up holly at Christmas and mailed it to Kansas relatives, who marveled that we had such a beautiful plant growing wild in our yard. And it's a gift that

keeps on giving—the locally abundant American holly, *Ilex opaca*, feeds so many of our favorite species. Our dogwood and holly trees have been throbbing with robins all month.

One year we named our new Christmas cocker puppy Holly. Her fancy AKC name was *Ilex opuppa*, and like her namesake, she was sturdy, cheerful, and perfectly hardy here in Zone 7, and preferred acid, well-drained soil.

There are several other holly species native to Virginia. Yaupon holly, *Ilex vomitoria*, is also evergreen, but its leaves are much smaller, resembling boxwood. It is much sturdier than box, however, and can be easily pruned into hedges and topiary. When you visit the Governors Palace, notice the perfectly shaped columns of yaupon holly, representing the 12 apostles, as you exit the ballroom door. It is also used in the holly maze. Unpruned specimens will bear small shiny red berries.

Not all holly berries are red. Inkberry, *Ilex glabra*, bears black fruit, and can also be pruned into an attractive hedge.

Two deciduous hollies are at home here. Possum haw, *Ilex decidua*, grows to a small tree size. The most spectacular is winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, which grows at the end of our driveway. There is a fabulous show of red berries on bare branches in late November and December. It is a wonderful shrub to cut for Christmas decorations, if you can get to the berries before the birds devour them. It must not be as tasty as the other varieties; for it is the last holly they choose to eat.

Most hollies are dioecious; both male and female plants are needed to produce berries. If your holly doesn't bear fruit, chances are it is a male or a lonely female. You can actually determine the sex of your plants by examining the blossoms in the spring. You don't even need a magnifying glass to recognize the round green ovary in the middle of the female blossoms, which will develop into the red fruit after pollination. Nurseries mark the male and female plants, so if you are starting with new hollies, be sure to buy a mated pair, and plant them close together. I didn't get any fruit on our winterberry until I moved the male much closer to the female. Evidently they needed a double bed.

Happy Holly Days to you and all your feathered friends.