THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 30, Number 3 Website: www.wmbgbirdclub.com March 2006

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Bob Long

Had a great birding experience last week. Our granddaughters, (ages 11 and 6), were visiting so they accompanied us to Bill Williams' *Bird Life of the Colonial Historic Triangle* class at Christopher Wren. The girls were fascinated by Bill's presentation and after class wrote short descriptive poems about the Black Backed Gull and the Great Blue Heron. Later, while sitting at our bird-watching window, the girls enthusiastically identified most of the feeder birds, with Mr. Sibley's help and binoculars.

Plans for our "Nature Camp for Grownups" April 8 at New Quarter Park are progressing nicely. We met with "camp counselors" Hugh Beard, Gerry Johnson and Sara Lewis at the park on President's Day for a planning session. Sign up soon or you may lose your spot. The enrollment is limited to 16 people and registrations are coming in. This promises to be a fun, learning day!

MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE DUE!

The Club Treasurer, Chuck Rend, reminds some members that Annual Club Dues are now due. If you have already renewed – THANKS VERY MUCH. Those who have not yet renewed have an envelope in their newsletter this month. If you've lost the envelope, mail your check to WBC, PO Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187. Here are the membership levels: $35 for patrons, $25 for families, $15 for individuals and $5 for students.

Unfortunately, if you do not renew by the end of March, you will be dropped from the mailing list and will not receive the newsletter every month.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

All club meetings start at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 in Millington Hall at William and Mary. Mark these dates on your calendar:

March 15: Club Member Duryea Morton will share his video, "Birds of the Falklands Islands." Members may remember the short video Duryea showed last fall of the Great Horned Owl at Jamestown Island. Duryea and his wife visited the Falklands last fall. Before retiring, Mr. Morton taught in elementary school and was associated with the Audubon Society at a variety of levels for over 20 years including VP of Education at the National Audubon Society for nine years.

April 19: Brenda Tekin, Wildlife Photographer who lives in Charlottesville but travels widely to photograph birds and other wildlife, will share some of her photographs and show us how "digiscoping" works and how she takes those wonderful pictures you see on her web site: <http://www.birdsofvirginia.com/>. Look for more info in the April newsletter.

May 17: Thelma Dalmas, Treasurer of the Virginia Society for Ornithology, who lives in Evington, VA, will present a slide show, "Spring on Warbler Row." Warbler Row is a very "birdy" forest service road in Botetourt County, famous for warblers and wildflowers in May. After her presentation, you'll still have a couple of weeks to travel to Warbler Row to add some warblers to your year or life list. Look for more information in the May newsletter.

MARCH FIELD TRIPS AND BIRD WALKS

March 11, 7:00 a.m.: Bill Williams will lead the regular 2nd Saturday Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. Meet at the front gate by 7:00 a.m. when the gate will be unlocked for us. Latecomers will not be able to enter the locked gate, and will need to hike about a mile into the park. New Quarter Park is located at the end of Lakeshead Drive, which lies between the Queens Lake subdivision and the Colonial Parkway. From Williamsburg take the Colonial parkway toward Yorktown, turn right at the Queens Lake sign, then another quick right onto Lakeshead Drive, which ends at the park.

March 18, 8:00 a.m.: Randy Coleman will lead our Field trip in The Vineyards. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at The Vineyards Club House. This is a walking

field trip around the lake and residential area. We should still see some ducks on the lake plus some early migrants. Follow the highway "winery" signs to The Vineyards. Take the 2nd left turn from Lake Powell Road and follow the main road around to the right until you see the sign for the club house.

March 19, 7:00 a.m.: Jane Frigo will lead the regular 3rd Sunday walk at Newport News Park sponsored by the Hampton Roads Bird Club. Meet at the park office parking lot. Jane's Phone #: 873-0721.

March 25, 8:00 a.m.: Tom Armour will lead the regular 4th Saturday Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. Meet at the front gate by 8:00 a.m. when the gate will be unlocked for us. Latecomers will not be able to enter the locked gate, and will need to hike about a mile into the park.

NATURE CAMP FOR GROWNUPS APRIL 8

Sign up soon for the April 8 "Nature Camp for Grownups." Actually, you just need to be 16 or older to enjoy this day outdoors – on the water and in the fields and forests at New Quarter Park. You can choose from sessions focused on the flora and fauna of land habitats and participate in a kayaking venture to learn about creek and wetland ecosystems. This is designed to be a small-group experience with knowledgeable Virginia naturalists. The $95 all-inclusive fee covers continental breakfast, lunch, snacks, beverages, kayaks and gear and all printed materials.

This is jointly sponsored by the Williamsburg Bird Club and New Quarter Park, York County Parks & Recreation. Call or email Shirley Devan to register or for more information – 220-6269 (home) or 813-1322 (cell) or <naturecamp@cox.net.>

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to new members: Joseph Heyman, Rosemarie Mussler, Sue and Felix Brandon, Christine and Dave Wilcox, and Rockwell and Anita Lowe. We look forward to seeing you at an upcoming meeting, field trip or at the Nature Camp.

PARTICIPANTS IN "ADOPT A HIGHWAY" OUTING

The scheduled clean up February 11 was snowed out, but five hardy members turned out the day after to improve the appearance of our Route 5 stretch of highway. Thanks to: John Fennell, Dick Kiefer, Alex & Mike Minarik and Emedio Bracalente. Thanks also to John Fennell for organizing and calling folks to reschedule after the snow started. John says "we'll do it again in the fall – without the snow!"

FEBRUARY (AND JANUARY) 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/ travels, please share!

January 8: Grace and Joe Doyle report 39 species from their regular Sunday survey at Camp Peary. Highlights include: Pied-billed Grebe, Mute Swan, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark and American Goldfinch.

January 22: Grace and Joe Doyle report 40 species from their trip to Camp Peary. In addition to the birds of January 8, highlights include a Horned Grebe, Tundra Swan, Gadwall, Killdeer, Pileated Woodpecker, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Common Grackle and Brown-headed Cowbird.

January 27: Shirley Devan reports: an Eastern Phoebe at Longhill Swamp this afternoon. Also, a Great Blue Heron seen sitting on snags near two nests! Plus, a pair of Red-tailed Hawks heading into the woods. Those hormones are starting to flow.

January 30: Grace and Joe Doyle report 35 species from their Sunday venture to Camp Peary. In addition to the "usual suspects," highlights were Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler and House Sparrow – all seen for the first time in January.

January 31: Tom Armour reports at the vineyards 11 Bufflehead, 3 Ring-necked Ducks and 23 Killdeer in the flooded field on Treasure Island Road.

January 31: Bill Holcombe reports: "Jan.31 started a good couple of birding days for me; Sunday I jumped a foot when a bird with a long tail burst out of tall grass right next to me. When it settled on a nearby tree the long tail turned out to be on a squirrel and while the hawk seemed small enough to be a Sharp-shinned, the round tail said it was a Cooper's Hawk. Monday saw Pine Warblers and Yellow-rumps on my suet. Tuesday a Hairy Woodpecker took over the suet and on Wednesday I finally saw my first of season

Hermit Thrush. Thursday the Pine Warblers were back but a gorgeous, vividly colored Yellow-bellied Sapsucker took the prize. That yellow belly was well displayed as he clambered around the suet cage. Also heard from member Martha Briggs that a Red-shouldered Hawk sat on the phone wire in back of her house on Jamestown Road for a great long spell. Goldfinches, as many as 50 at a time, are eating up a huge amount of thistle seed on her farm over in Surry."

February 1: Tom Armour reports 1 Hermit Thrush and a Brown Creeper at his feeders.

February 5: Fred Blystone reports "Today I went on the regular bird walk at Newport News Park led by Jane Frigo of the Hampton Roads Bird Club. There were six participants and we saw 38 species. The highlights for me were American Wigeon, seeing an additional female Redhead so there are now two pair, a Red-headed Woodpecker, a Brown Creeper and a Golden-crowned Kinglet. It was the first time this year (4 bird walks) that we didn't see a Bald Eagle. After this walk I went to Ridgeway Park in Hampton. I saw about 40 American Wigeon along with one Eurasian Wigeon that is a regular there. Also saw the resident Black-crowned Night Herons. Also stopped at Sandy Bay Nature Park for a few minutes — the highlight there was an American Coot."

February 5: Grace and Joe Doyle report 34 species from their regular Sunday survey at Camp Peary. Highlights were Pied-billed Grebe, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Red-tailed Hawk, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Northern Mockingbird, Eastern Towhee, Red-winged Blackbird and Eastern Meadowlark. February 6: Fred Blystone reports "I was in the College Creek area on the Parkway and had a Northern Harrier hunting between the river and the Parkway. It made a couple of passes before going across the Parkway and disappearing over the creek."

February 6: Tom Armour reports (excitedly) "a Red-breasted Nuthatch at my feeder!!!"

February 9: Tom McCary reports seeing the Black and white Warbler again in the arbor at Shirley Plantation. This is the second sighting – the first one was in January.

February 11: Shirley Devan reports a Brown Creeper on an oak tree just across the fence in the neighbor's yard. First ever sighting in her yard. Total species for the year is 75.

February 12: Bill Holcombe reports: "Within a 25 minute period these woodpeckers were on my suet: Red-bellied, Sapsucker, Hairy and Downy. The Hairy has become sort of a regular and the Sapsucker is pleasantly frequent. The beauty of this bird is hard to appreciate flattened against a tree, but hanging from a suet cake 20 feet away he is magnificent."

February 15: Tom Armour reports 3 Lesser Black-backed Gulls seen on the sand bar at the mouth of College Creek.

February 15: Grace and Joe Doyle report from their home in Kingsmill that they observed Red-shouldered Hawks mating near the nest visible from their deck.

February 16: Shirley Devan reports a Red-headed Woodpecker at Jamestown Island in the area behind the pull off with the sign "The Island House." Also saw a Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, Red-bellied Woodpecker. No sign of the Great Horned Owl.

February 18: Dorothy Whitfield reports 7 American Goldfinches at her Wild Birds Unlimited thistle feeder. She reports they are regular visitors every day.

February 19, Bill Williams reports from Greensprings Trail – 1 American Pipit, 1 Purple Finch.

February 19: Fred Blystone reports: "I joined Hampton Roads Bird Club members Jane Frigo who was the leader, Richard Hudgins and Cathy Bond for a cold morning bird walk in Newport News Park. At 7 when we started, it was 17 degrees and it got up to 23 by the time we finished at 10. We saw 39 species. The highlights for me were a Cooper's Hawk and an American Coot. We didn't see the Redhead Ducks or the Red-headed Woodpeckers which I have seen the other 4 times I've birded the park this year.

February 20: Dorothy Whitfield reports Purple Finches, Hairy Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpeckers for the last three days at her feeder station.

February 21: Bill Holcombe reports: "Hard to believe but the vision in bright light was positive – a Belted Kingfisher was sitting on a tree branch on the edge of the Route 199-Route 5 pond with a minnow dangling from its mouth. And for certain beyond him were two small diving birds, but the necessity of driving without an accident made it impossible to be certain that they were Pied-billed Grebes."

February 21: Linda Scherer reports: A Great Egret flew in to the roost area on the lake in First Colony late this afternoon.

February 22: Dorothy Whitfield reports a female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

February 23: Shirley Devan observes two pairs of Great Blue Herons mating within a span of 10 minutes at the heronry on Longhill Road next to

the Christian Life Center. Also, a Red-tailed Hawk screamed overhead and a Red-headed Woodpecker sat on the edge of the woods.

February 23: Hugh Beard reports: "I have had a Baltimore Oriole at my suet feeder for the past two days. It appears to be a first spring female. Boy, it sure stands out among all of the blackbirds and starlings! At first I was really reluctant to call it an oriole (1st spring females have no black heads). A check of the GBBC data showed that there were many orioles seen in Virginia last weekend. In fact, one was reported in Williamsburg."

February 23: Bill Williams reports a Fish Crow at College Creek.

February 23: Tom Armour reports: at about 4:00 p.m. today I had a Baltimore Oriole perched on the telephone wires at the end of Treasure Island Road (about half way down the white fence) and at the Vineyards,12 Ring-necked Ducks.

February 24: Bill Williams reports a Baltimore Oriole visiting his bird feeder in Settler's Mill.

February 25: Tom McCary reports 3 Golden-crowned Kinglets in the arbor at Shirley Plantation.

February 25: Joe and Grace Doyle report from Camp Peary: 3 Red-tailed Hawks, a Bald Eagle, Eastern Meadowlarks mixed in with Starlings, a Gray Catbird and Killdeer.

February 25: Shirley Devan reports from Freedom Park: "I went to check out the pond that Hugh Beard told me about. It's about a ½ mile from the ellipse – called Colby Swamp on the park map. Given that they were having a mountain bike race in the park and the wind was picking up, I really did not expect to see much – and I didn't – until I was coming back and was within sight of the fenced area around the archeological dig. All of a sudden, very birdy – four woodpecker species: Pileated, Downy, Red-bellied and Flicker. Also, Eastern Bluebirds and an adult Bald Eagle flying overhead. But the surprise and delight of the afternoon was the American Kestrel, one of my favorite birds!! I spotted him flying along the edge from one perch to another. Then he flew out over the field, swooped around a few times, and then headed back to the edge of the woods."

February 26: Grace and Joe Doyle report 30 species from their Sunday survey at Camp Peary. (Their trips on February 12 and 19 were rained out and snowed out!) Birds not seen on their earlier February trip were: Canvasback, Bald Eagle, Northern Flicker, Gray Catbird, Song Sparrow and White-throated Sparrow.

RED-TAILED HAWKS IN NYC

The Red-tailed Hawks in Central Park have been observed mating – the first occurrence was at 10:59 a.m. February 5. Mating observed again (6 times!) on February 25. To see spectacular photos and check the status of nesting, eggs, and nestlings, go to: <www.palemale.com.>

McCARY'S MIGRANTS

Our own Tom McCary, Vice President for Programming for the Bird Club, is also the in-house birder at Shirley Plantation in Charles City County. For the past few years he has written "McCary's Migrants" for the Plantation's newsletter, featuring news and notes about the birds on the property. Now you can read some of his writings on the web site for Shirley Plantation: <http://www.shirleyplantation.com/birdwatching.html.>

CVWO BEGINS HAWKWATCH AND SPRING BANDING

By Brian Taber and Robert Ake

The 10th consecutive year of the College Creek Hawkwatch began today. The hawkwatch is the only regular late winter/spring hawkwatch in Virginia. The site is just east of Williamsburg on the Colonial Parkway, where northbound migrants cross the James River, usually from about 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. It is a volunteer effort operated by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. The season usually extends to late May. Visitors are welcome.

"Today, February 8th, Fred Blystone and I watched as the first migrant of the season, a Red-tailed Hawk crossed, followed soon by a group of 8 Black Vultures, 3 Turkey Vultures, an immature Bald Eagle and another Red-tailed."

The CVWO will again operate a spring banding station in First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach, beginning March 15, 2006, and continuing through the middle of June. The banding station will again be located near the intersection of Long Creak and White Lake Trails. Jethro Runco, who opened and operated the station last year, will be the bander this spring too. The station is about a mile and a half south of the visitor's center parking lot – an easy walk from the parking lot. Make plans to visit Jethro at the station this spring.

WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED DONATIONS TO BIRD CLUB

Since 1994 George and Val Copping, owners of Wild Birds Unlimited in Williamsburg, have donated $3861 to the Williamsburg Bird Club. This is a percentage of their sales to bird club members. The club uses these funds to buy books and videos for the local library, support local conservation organizations and provide research grants to graduate students.

In the photo (left to right): George Copping and

Val Copping, owners of Wild Birds Unlimited at Monticello Marketplace, present a "check" to Charles Rend, Treasurer, and Bob Long, President, of the Williamsburg Bird Club.

When you shop at Wild Birds Unlimited be sure to tell the cashier you are a member of the Bird Club so that a portion of your purchase comes back to the Club! Thanks to George and Val Copping for their support over the years and to the members who shop there!

BACKYARD HABITAT

By Cynthia Long

When we bought our lot over 30 years ago, it was a small forest of young loblolly pine and sassafras trees, two of the pioneer trees that sprout in cleared ground. The realtor who developed the property planted the pines, but nature planted the sassafras. Every wildlife lover should have sassafras, *Sassafras albidum.* They thrive in a dry, sunny habitat, but once the larger trees begin to shade them, as did the pine trees in our yard, they decline. The young seedling must have sun to survive, and the older trees must have sun to thrive.

Their greenish-brown winter branches provide plenty of perches for easy-to-spot birds. Starting in April, expect small short-lived yellow blooms. The leaves are larval food for spicebush swallowtail butterflies. Later in the summer, the female trees will bear blue fruits, set in a colorful red-stemmed cup. Be sure to watch for woodpeckers and other frugiferous birds who come in great numbers to feast. I call it woodpecker week – even the pileated makes an appearance. You'll also enjoy colorful red and yellow foliage in autumn.

Sassafras is a great "Grandma" tree for teaching children different leaf forms. Some leaves are right-handed mittens, some are left-handed mittens and others have three lobes. Still others are entire, with no lobes. Sometimes all of the shapes are on one tree. Scratch the slender branches to release the familiar scent of root beer. For many years sassafras was the source of root beer flavoring, but man-made oil has replaced the natural sassafras which is suspected of being a carcinogen.

If you don't have room for a full sized tree, (they can reach 50 feet), plant its smaller cousin, the spicebush, *Lindera benzoin*, which is the Virginia Native Plant Society's Wildflower of the Year. It also has a pungent scent, but not pleasant for root beer. It smells like lighter fluid to me. It also attracts spicebush swallowtail butterflies as well as several other species. Spicebush develops a shiny red fruit in late summer. Sassafras and spicebush are spread by the birds who feast on them. As hurricanes and tree guys have thinned our overpowering loblolly pines the sassafras have begun to re-sprout and thrive. I'm thankful I could witness this cycle and enjoy again the benefits of a sassafras woodland.

MOUNTAIN MIGRATORY BIRD FESTIVAL

Celebrate spring migration at the Giles County birding festival May 19 – 21 at Mountain Lake Hotel (1-800-346-3334). You will have over 35 field trips and workshops to choose from, including rafting on the New River. The activities begin at noon on Friday with field and float trips. Those will be followed by a slide presentation of "The Birds of Mountain Lake" with Jerry Via and a Moth Watch with Teta Kain.

Saturday will be filled with field trips, workshops, and children's nature activities. A banquet that evening will be topped off with Keynote Speaker, Bill Hilton. Bill has spent the past two winters banding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in Costa Rica with his project Operation Ruby

Throat. Then more field trips on Sunday.

For more information, visit the website, <www.mountainlakebirding.com> or contact Peggy Spiegel at <gramby@ pemtel.net> or 540-921-4340.

Sponsors: Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, For the Birds, Giles County, Mt. Lake Hotel, Inn at Riverbend,

BIRDS, BLOSSOMS & BLUES FESTIVAL AT NORFOLK BOTANICAL GARDEN

Bird watching is one of the fastest-growing pastimes in the world, and this year the Birds, Blossoms & Blues Festival at Norfolk Botanical Garden is taking the hobby to new heights. The 2006 Festival combines the Garden's popular annual plant sale with guided tours to restricted-access birding areas, and adds the beat of blues and bluegrass as a backdrop for family activities. The Mother's Day weekend festival kicks off with a blues revue concert on Thursday, May 11th.

For birders, bird-watching will get wild with trips to guided-only sanctuaries, including the Great Dismal Swamp, Piney Grove, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, False Cape State Park, the Weyanoke Sanctuary and Savage Neck Dunes Natural Area Preserve. Join the prowl for owls at Seashore State Park or the entire family can tour the waters of Lake Whitehurst on the Nature on the Lake Boat Tour. Also new this year is an upclose look at the Garden's family of American Bald Eagles with The Garden's new "eagle cam." On a variety of walking tours within the 155 acres, knowledgeable guides will answer questions about the 95 species of birds that call the Garden home.

The gardening-inclined will enjoy guided walks highlighting the Garden's Flowering Arboretum, Virginia Native Plant Garden and the new Hummingbird Garden.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will be on hand to help gardeners and bird enthusiasts develop their own Habitat at Home® to attract specific birds, beneficial insects and wildlife. Whether beginner or advanced gardener, Norfolk Botanical Garden is taking the guesswork out of themed gardening at its annual Gardener's Market and Plant Sale. For the first time, the Plant Sale will include *plant packages* with everything needed for Habitat at Home®, as well as groundcovers, tropicals, fragrant plants, perennial favorites, natives, winter interest, container gardens or varieties that grow well with roses. To help with planned planting, horticulture experts will offer advice on where to find these favorites in the Garden so gardeners can see plants in "real-life" settings before taking them home.

See the full schedule of Birds, Blossoms & Blues activities and register online at www.norfolkbotanicalgarden.org.

Nature Camp for Grownups

Sponsored by
The Williamsburg Bird Club and
New Quarter Park

York County Parks & Recreation

Location: New Quarter Park

(York County near Queens Lake)

Date: Saturday, April 8, 2006

Time: 7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Fee: $95 - including continental breakfast, lunch, snacks, beverages, materials, kayaks & equipment.

A day outdoors in a small group setting with experienced naturalists and leaders focused on the Virginia Peninsula's natural environment - landforms, plants, and animals, and their interrelationships.

Four sessions to choose from - two three-hour kayaking ventures on Queens Creek (no experience necessary, but should be comfortable on the water) plus two three-hour strolls in the forests, meadows, and trails of New Quarter Park with Bird Club Past President and experienced naturalist Hugh Beard.

Lunch break features guest speaker, Dr. Gerald Johnson, Professor Emeritus, W&M Department of Geology.

The fine print: Open to the public. Limited to 16 participants, age 16 and over. Register and pay by March 31. Call Shirley Devan, Williamsburg Bird Club, at 757-813-1322 to register or for more information. Email: sedevan52@cox.net. www.wmbgbirdclub.com

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