



HOWARD

A T R A D I T I O N

The second annual Chincoteague trip over Washington's Birthday 3-day holiday has been declared a tradition for the Howard County Chapter and plans are already underway for the 1975 event.

The weather was cold, some rain, and too much wind but while the weather was not as favorable as last year, the birds were more cooperative. Larry Hood was the leader again this year and as in the previous year, was greatly responsible for the success of the trip.

The unfavorable weather predictions and the gasoline shortage frightened some members from taking off for 3 days but both hazzards were overstated. The group missed the Howard County snow storm completely (rain=yes, snow=no) and once the bridge was crossed, there was no evidence of the gasoline shortage.

Stops on the way to Chincoteague were made at Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary, Blackwater Wildlife Refuge (to get a bald eagle on the list), and other scattered spots that looked productive. Peggy Hood had typed last year's list and marked columns for this year's findings. With this list, a goal was set immediately to match and then outdo the 1973 list. The first "new" bird not on last year's roster was a redhead duck seen on this side of the Bay Bridge. A comparison of the first day's list for the two years showed six new species for this year but no match for the killdeer or black vulture seen last year. These two species never did make the 1974 list.

The second day at Chincoteague was clear but cold and windy. Birding was good with great views of oystercatchers, bufflehead, lesser and greater yellowlegs, brown-headed nuthatches very much in the open for study, a covey of quail on the parking lot at the refuge, one common loon, several Louisiana heron, a flash view of a clapper rail and many more. Larry Hood successfully trapped two kestrels on a trip outside the refuge which began as a search for the red-headed woodpecker (never found). Larry banded one kestrel, the other was wearing a band.

Monday morning on the way to Ocean City, many water pipits were spotted in an open field as well as several palm warblers in the trees at the edge of the field. In Ocean City purple sandpipers and common eider were seen. Horned lark were seen at Aszateague State Park.

The official list--106 species seen--to be beaten in 1975!

OWLS IN THE TOWER AGAIN

The Smithsonian Institution has owls in its five-story tower of the old castle again after an absence of 20 years. At some time in the 1860s barn owls took up residence in the tower and year in and year out owls lived and nested in the old tower. In the mid-1950s, the owls were evicted, shut out by shutting and locking the windows. The birds hadn't been all that neat and the managers decided that it just wasn't sanitary so the owls had to go.

About two years ago, present day management at the Smithsonian decided it would like to have owls living in the tower again and unlocked the windows and left them open. No new tenants came. Now the Smithsonian has placed two barn owls from the Washington zoo in the tower and they will be kept in with the windows closed until they take up residence and can be trusted not to escape. Four volunteers climb steep ladders to feed them a ration of mice and rats sent over from the zoo until they are allowed to forage for themselves.

The story prompted the Washington Post to publish an editorial which repeated the above story of the owls and closed with these comments:

"We hope the owls do decide to make the tower their free home. We would like these ancient symbols of wisdom to acknowledge an important change in man's conventional wisdom. All that efficiency and sanitizing, we are beginning to learn, has tended to make a polluted mess of the earth. We seem willing again to live in peace with owls and the rest of nature. Let us hope the owls are willing to live with us."
(Washington Post, February 20, 1974)

RE M I N D E R

Barclay E. Tucker, MOS President reminds members to be alert to the undesirable features of the energy crisis bill in Congress SB 2589. It proposes to grant extension to 1979 of many of the present practices concerning pollution. For example, it allows high sulfur coal to be used until 1979. Many authorities believe that the extension should be for one year and subject to reconsideration after one year.

GOOD NEWS * BAD NEWS

The bird feeder field trip on Saturday morning, February 23 was one of those good news-bad news outings. The gasoline shortage and the strong chilly wind kept attendance down and that is always bad news. The variety of ducks often seen at Wilde Lake this winter just weren't there, the mallards and a male gadwall were seen. Good news was a tour lead by host Walt Beck around his farm and through the field he has planted especially to attract birds--Japanese millet, German millet, and soy beans. The expected Savannah sparrow was not seen but lots of juncos, cardinals, crows, a field sparrow, chickadees, and other species were seen. Again there was bad news when Mrs. Munro called to state the strong winds seemed to be too much for the birds at her house as there was no action at all at her feeders; Al Geis came to the rescue and an unscheduled stop was made at his place. A pleasant surprise there was a spectacular view of a fox sparrow. The brown thrasher seen at the last visit to the Geis feeder made an appearance and among the other species seen were white-crowned sparrow, chickadees, and godfinches. The Bob Herndon feeders added purple finches, a white-breasted nuthatcher and pine siskins to the list for the day. That was good news and so were the doughnuts and hot coffee on such a chilly morning.

COMING EVENTS

FIELD TRIPS

MARCH 16, SATURDAY: Old Camp Woodbine (home of Nancy & Jim Zimmerly) nature walk. This is the second walk in the series of four seasonal walks through one of Howard County's really beautiful and interesting areas. Again this will be an afternoon outing which should attract those who like to sleep in on weekends. Meet Larry Hood, leader (730-9251), at 1 p.m. at Swansfield Elementary School parking lot for car pooling. Wear comfortable walking shoes. Coffee will be served at the Camp and the walk will be concluded around 5 p.m.

MARCH 31, SUNDAY: Banding Demonstration. Kathy Klimkiewicz and David Holmes will explain and demonstrate bird banding at Piscataway. This will be a great morning for everyone; be sure to bring the children. It ought to be a good day to bring the camera for some good close-up bird shots. Meet David Holmes (730-7083) at 7:30 a.m. at Swansfield Elementary School parking lot for car pooling.

APRIL 6, SATURDAY: Patuxent Bird Club invites birders on an evening trip for woodcock and owls. Meet at 9th and Montgomery in Laurel at 6:45 P.M. Trip canceled in case of heavy rain. If in doubt, call Jay Sheppard, leader (776-8476). Courtship flight of woodcock and resident owls.

PROGRAM

APRIL 11, THURSDAY: Jerry Longcore with part 2 of AVIAN ARCHITECTS. Part 1 was a popular program last year so Jerry is coming back with more pictures of nests, eggs, and young birds. His pictures are quite remarkable and were all taken in this general area (Maryland, Virginia, Washington, D.C.) Swansfield Elementary School at 7:30.

BIRD NOTES

Fox sparrows have been welcome visitors at several feeders recently. Young birder Elizabeth Rhinelander spotted one at the feeder at her home and identified the bird for her family.

Frances Ehlers has seen a bluebird perched on one of the bluebird houses at her place on Brighton Dam Road. Hopefully he was ready to claim the territory and the house. She had also seen one earlier in the week drinking at a puddle near her house. Frances had several bluebird families last year.