

DVOC NEWSLETTER

Volume III, No. 1

January 1976

PROGRAMS

- February 5, 1976 Dr. Keith Richards--Ornithological Identification Problems
- February 19 Richard Walter--Birding on Iron Range, Cape York Peninsula,
North Queensland, Australia
- March 4 Rick Mellon--Bowman's Hill
- March 18 Robert Mangold--Clapper Rails in South Jersey
- April 1 Dr. Ernest Choate--Birding and Botanizing in South Africa
- April 15 Otto A. Heck--Ecological Study of Suburban vs. Rural Great
Horned Owls
- May 6 A night at Schuylkill Valley Nature Center with Dick James.
Come early and look for warblers. Box supper if desired.
- May 27 (4th Thursday) Spring Round-Up Reports
- June, July, August Informal meetings on the first Thursday of each month.
- September Informal meetings on the first and third Thursday.

All meetings (except May 6) are at the Academy of Natural Sciences at 8:00 P.M.
Charles A. Wonderly, Program Chairman

CONGRATULATIONS

At the January 8 meeting George Reynard was elected to the select group of Honorary Members of the DVOC. George, a club member since 1949, has made many well-known contributions to the field of ornithology. Certainly, his rediscovery of the Puerto Rican Whip-poor-will and his extensive work on bird recordings in cooperation with the late Dr. Paul Kellogg of Cornell qualify him for this high honor.

The Julian K. Potter Award for 1975 to Alan Brady

The Witmer Stone Award for 1975 to Dr. Ernest Choate

Elected Fellows of the DVOC: Rick Mellon, Keith Richards, Elmer Rowley, Keith Seager

DUES FOR 1976: \$10.00 Please remit to the treasurer:

Walter Lipski
485 Willow Road
Cinnaminson, N. J. 08077

FROM THE EDITOR

The local newspapers seem to be surprisingly out of touch with the burgeoning interest in nature study. Great numbers of people would like to read a regular nature column, but they get instead such a travesty as the Inquirer's "Outdoors" column. On January 9, 1976, this column extolled the hunting of Ruffed Grouse in such a way as to elicit the following letter from the editor of this Newsletter. The Ruffed Grouse is admittedly not exactly an endangered species, but then again neither was the Passenger Pigeon.

Dear Sirs,

I would like to protest the outdated mentality your paper keeps alive in its so-called "Outdoors" column by Jim Bashline. His piece on the joys of hunting the Ruffed Grouse is one that I will use in my English classes as an example of that most delicious kind of irony in which a partisan in defending his cause convicts himself with his own words.

He begins by bemoaning the fact that there aren't as many Ruffed Grouse as there used to be when he was a "lucky kid" and killed two a day. (I wonder how many a skilled adult would bring down?) Of course his point about changing habitat is valid, and I won't argue that our precocious Master Bashline had anything to do with the decline of the species. In fact I don't want to rehash past history; my point is that gunners live in the past; I want to consider the present and future.

Mr. Bashline's endless speculations and rationalizations about the bird's scarcity are just not to the point. The only statement in the entire article of real importance is that the "birds just aren't there in quantity anymore." Times have indeed changed, Mr. Bashline. Everything changes; it's the rule of our existence. Only the gunners' mentality remains constant: "My father and his father before him hunted this area; it's part of my birthright to continue the tradition." Here is the fatal error in reasoning that makes Mr. Bashline's last paragraph pure black humor: "Fortunately, the grouse is not extinct...." What does he conclude? Continue blazing away!

Is it not perfectly obvious that now that the species has declined and its habitat has been seriously restricted (Mr. Bashline tells us so!) it can no longer take the added pressure of hunting? Instead of protection, however, we turn more and more gunners loose with better weapons than ever before. Here is the perfect pattern for extinction. The hunters fail to adjust to radically altered conditions, and after the fact can point to the altered conditions as the chief cause of extinction. But it is in truth Mr. Bashline and his kind who will hound the species out of existence and call it sport.

NEW OFFICERS OF THE DVOC

Stephen T. Harty, President
 Charles A. Wonderly, Vice President
 James K. Meritt, Secretary
 Walter Lipski, Treasurer
 Keith Richards, Editor of Cassinia
 Harry Franzen, Ornithological Studies
 Frank Hubbard and Dr. Edward Wildman, Councillors

EDITOR OF THE DVOC NEWSLETTER: John LaVia, 56 Millbrook Drive, Willingboro, N. J.
 609-877-8025.

BIRDING BY THE NUMBERS

As everyone from the DVOC knows a trip to Cape May in the fall can be as rewarding as any experience in bird-watching. The constant movement of great numbers of birds of many different species provides the kind of action that must delight birders from the serious professional to the confused beginner. Most DVOC'ers are pleased to be somewhere between those extremes; moreover, the absolute birding skill of our members seems less important than the "proper" though somewhat intangible attitude that holds us together as a club. The best birders among us carry their ability lightly, and the least accomplished are able to join in with their observations without fear of those crushing put-downs so many "superior" birders feel obligated to deliver. There's a healthy spirit of give-and-take, but a sense of fun--stemming no doubt from the pure enjoyment of our pastime--is the common denominator that keeps the DVOC such a special group.

It was during a weekend at Cape May with another group of birders--the tiny Fort Washington Bird Club of the Washington, D.C. area--that I realized how easy it is to take the fun out of bird-watching. The genial members of the FWBC somehow managed to replace the joy of birding with a spirit of crass competition. Their idea of a weekend of birding begins with each individual calling out a number, representing his estimate of the total number of species to be observed by the party. The closest guess will eventually win a modest pool. The childishness of this sport is camouflaged with a great deal of rationalizing over the "scientific" basis of one's choice. The high man and the low man start bickering almost immediately over whether both yellow-legs have been seen; they also have differing views over whether or not to race up to Brigantine to add numbers to the list. The spirit of competition pervades every moment of the trip, with great emphasis placed on who saw what first. No bird is allowed to pass unlabeled even if no one got a good look or if the plumage was impossible to call with certainty. The method is to glance at the bird and then to have endless acrimonious debates over the plates in the field guides. Mort specializes in this elaborate process of elimination, but it is George who sets the tone of the day by aggressively parading his skill before anyone who happens to be within range of his voice including uninterested waitresses and gas-station attendants.

The numbers game takes precedence over any aesthetic pleasure. After a good day of birding there's nothing more enjoyable than sitting on the dunes of Higbee's Beach watching the hawks fly by. So what if we have little or no chance to add a new species to the list, a glimpse of another Peregrine Falcon is thrill enough for this bird-watcher. But, no, Mort is insistent, we must use the remaining daylight to get to Brigantine because the list is missing a few common ducks and shorebirds. The list is always in front of us with the bird's name barely preceding its number for the day: Louisiana Heron, number 109. The DVOC gets this kind of birding by the numbers out of its system once a year on the Spring Round-Up, but even then a spirit of cooperation is the keynote, not the competition that the FWBC needs to make its bird-watching "worthwhile." May the DVOC prevail!

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS:

Westley Doughty, Berwyn, Pa.
Ed Engerth, Chalfont, Pa.
Julian Boryszewski, Southampton, Pa.
Richard Morton, Moorestown, N. J.
John Padalino, Dingman's Ferry, Pa.
James Sands, Wawa, Pa.
Chris Stieber, Richboro, Pa.

Walter Free, Ambler, Pa.
Philip Spear, Narbeth, Pa.
Richard Walter, Devon, Pa.
Gary Krause, Havertown, Pa.
Armis Hill, Levittown, Pa.
Crawford Mechem, Devon, Pa.
Whitson Fowler, Drexel Hill, Pa.