

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLIER



The September meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will be held at 7:30 P.M. Wednesday, September 20, in Millington Hall. Our speakers for this month's meeting will be Susan Sturm and Nancy Courtney who will present a program on the flora and fauna of Kenya. Susan and Nancy are of course members of our club and they had the good fortune of spending a month this summer birding and touring this east African nation.

According to the calander it is still summer, but fall is in the air and so are the various phenomema associaged with the coming season: a few falling leaves, footballs, and most importantly - migrating birds. Migration of shore birds began in late July and early August, but some stragglers can still be found. Some good sites for shorebirds are Hog Island, Craney Island, or along any river or shoreline. Passerines begin migrating in late August and continue until about the first of November. Already in our area various orioles, vireos, and warblers have been observed. Of course these birds can be observed in your own back yard but be on the lookout particularly after a cold front has passed through the area. Even a seemingly mild front can bring in an incredible number of birds. Hawk migration will begin about the first of September and will also continue into November. Numerous falcons, accipiters, and buteos may be observed, especially along the eastern shore and in the mountains.

Fall birding can be extremely rewarding, however, at the same time it can be a very frustrating experience. Even an experienced birder can have problems with field identification. The most problems occur with identification of shorebirds and warblers because in many species the fall plumage is drastically different from breeding plumage. Often many species look very similar to each other (especially shorebirds) and appear "dull and drab". Most field guides show spring and winter plumages, and with a bit of practice and persistence, correct identifications can be made. Although many species are not as colorful at this time of year we can still enjoy the birds, and we should get out as much as possible to observe and learn.

Over the Labor Day weekend the nets were put up and the Kiptopeke banding station was opened for business once again. Kiptopeke is located on the southern tip of the eastern shore of Virginia (Cape Charles) about two miles north of the Bay Bridge toll plaza. Every fall some 50 nets are set up in various habitats (fields, shoreline, forest, and forest edge) and are opened daily, weather permitting, until the first part of November. Many passerines in the Atlantic flyway migrate down the eastern shore and funnel down to Kiptopeke before flying across the Chesapeake Bay. As a result many individuals and species are caught in the nets and banded. Several persons share the banding responsibilities for intervals of one week per bander and include Charlie Hacker and Mike & Dorothy Mitchell from our bird club. If you are interested in going to Kiptopeke contact Bill

Williams, Ruth Beck, or Susan Sturm for more details. Also, if you are interested in hawks, Bill is planning on spending any free weekend time he has censusing hawks at various points on the eastern shore.

Our August field trip to Craney Island had something less than a big turn-out but approximately 50 species of birds were seen, including avocets, stilt sandpipers, and horned larks. Also in August Bill Sheehan saw some 20 turkeys one afternoon at Cheatham Annex. Let's not forget our September field trip to Hog Island, Saturday, Sept. 23. Please assemble by 7:00 A.M. in the Jamestown Festival parking lot.

Migrating is very dangerous business for all birds. Before migrating the bird must be prepared to meet the energy requirements for prolonged flight by reaching a special metabolic state in which there is a heavy deposition of fat. When the bird has reached the required physiological condition, a stimulus is required to release the pattern of migratory behavior. Scientists believe this stimulus is very often some external factor, such as a sudden change in temperature. In their long flights over land and water, birds are likely to meet disaster from several factors: weather, predators, or inadequate food or cover. One way in which many birds have overcome some of these obstacles is from nocturnal migration. Generally, small birds (weak flyers) inhabit forests, shrublands, marshes, and tall grasses. Therefore movement by night would afford these species which are accustomed to vegetational cover the protection of darkness against hawks, falcons, and other enemies. Also, movement by night would enable the bird to use daylight hours for feeding and building up sufficient energy requirements. Birds which tend to be strong, fast flyers and which in their normal lives tend to be found in the open are more likely to migrate during the daylight hours. A great number of the larger birds such as waterfowl and gulls and terns appear to be indifferent to any nocturnal/diurnal conditions and are found to migrate either by day or night. (from A Laboratory and Field Manual of Ornithology by O.S. Pettingill).

We are looking forward to meeting again with our club members now that the summer is over. Don't forget to bring your summer check lists and nest records to the meeting. Now that we are an established club we hope that we can spend a little less time with organizational business and get down to the business at hand - learning about birds. And don't let our officers shoulder all the work; we can all help Ruth with programs, Susan with the newsletter, and Brian with field trips. Hope to see everyone Wed. night when we go on safari with Susan and Nancy in Kenya.