

WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

July 1980

"Spring has sprung, Fall has fell, Summer's here and . . . THINK SNOW! I mean, what other choice is there. Three and a half months ago we were thinking summer and dryness and look what it got us!"

Remember, there will be no monthly meeting for July or August. There will be a field trip this month to Lake Matoaka on July 19. Those attending should assemble at 7:00 AM at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center. The trip should last only a few hours and will reveal the local breeding birds of the college woods.

In August the field trip will take place on the 23rd when we will venture to Craney Island for a day of shorebirding.

With no business to speak of this puts us right into the bird news. In mid-June Richard Goll called to report the presence of two male and one female dickcissels at Shirley Plantation. The birds had been originally located there by Fred Scott of Richmond in late May. This species is common to abundant in the mid-west, but rare in Virginia especially in summer on the coastal plain. Several club members including Susan Sturm and Betty Williams were able to see this miniature meadowlark-like finch at very close range. Brian Taber was able to photograph them and we can only hope he'll share his excellent shots with us in September.

While journeying to Shirley Plantation via Route 5 an easy side trip for an unusual Virginia coastal plain species is to cross the Hopewell bridge and stop at the marina on the south side of the James River and look for cliff swallows. There are approximately a dozen nests of this bird under the bridge near the marina.

Speaking of Rich Goll earlier. This enthusiastic field man is pushing for a 300-species-in-Virginia-year. On May 31 he ventured far offshore from Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach on a charter boat for a shot at pelagic birds. He was able to see such rarities as Manx shearwater and Leach's petrel. If this wasn't enough he attended the Mt. Roger's VSO breeding bird foray two weeks later and picked up alder flycatcher and saw-whet owl. Literally he has banded the highest and lowest areas of the state to reach Goll's goal. Good luck Rich!

Cynthia Long of Bowstring Drive Queen's Lake has been trying to attract purple martins to her home for several years. Finally, this June they showed up and apparently even nested. Unfortunately, English sparrows were also present. The martin nest was destroyed. Whether or not the sparrows did it is not known. It is possible the martins were young, inexperienced birds and simply were unable to fully coordinate their late breeding efforts. Nevertheless, there's hope that

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next year the martins may seriously take up residence at the Long's martin motel.

On July 6 an adult bald eagle was very well seen on Buzzard's Bay on the Chickahominy River by Dick Hines. This constitutes a rare summer record for our area.

Several club members are reporting success with hummingbird feeders. As the summer flowers wane these birds will seek feeders as will their young. A 25% sugar solution with red food coloring is the usual ticket. One local fellow even ran out of red coloring and tried green. The hummers didn't seem to mind at all!

Up to fourteen goldfinches regularly inhabit the cut-flower garden at the Colonial Williamsburg nursery off Quarterpath Road. They seem to love all the blossoms. Apparently they are feasting off the wide variety of insects the flowers attract. Also present are yellow-throated warblers, cuckoos and two pairs of bluebirds.

You've heard that one good bird deserves another. Well there is a slight modification to that adage. Simply respell "bird" with a y. Byrd. Last July a tiny fluff of feathers that would fit the palm of your hand was presented to Mitchell Byrd by a local Queen's Lake resident. Well this kind of thing is a common occurrence for any recognized ornithologist. However, the little fluff was not your usual robin or jay. It was a ring-necked pheasant chick found in his neighbor's yard. Mitchell had done graduate work on pheasants years back so the connection seemed correct and workable.

Enter Lois Byrd, Mitchell's wife. She took over the care and feeding of the little fluff which developed quickly, and seemed to adopt her as its parent. They took walks together even. The ironic part of the story is that the chick, a young male dubbed Cephas, will have nothing to do with Mitchell. Cephas is thoroughly dedicated to Lois and never misses a chance to whack the good doctor on the shoes or hand should he get too close. Lois, however, can hold young Cephas like cradling a cat and has no problem with him at all.

Cephas has developed beautiful male plumage over his first year and currently rests in the luxury of his own pen equipped with it's own fan and timer!

Like I said one good bird (Byrd) deserves another. You be the Judge!

Breeding activity for gulls, terns and skimmers was at its peak in late June. The lack of late spring and early summer storms has provided these birds with excellent breeding conditions. Recent surveys found thousands of young in all the colonies encountered along the eastern shore.

Royal terns were found breeding in the Chesapeake Bay this summer. This is their first recorded nesting away from the coastal islands in Virginia.

ASK OWL

Where did the purple martin get its name?

The genus name Progne is equivalent to Procne, the daughter of Pandion, who was turned into a swallow. The purple part is obvious. The term martin is of unknown derivation.