

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER  
JULY 1982

Not only did the month open with the literal bang of a nation celebrating its birthday but ole Mom nature presented us with a lunar spectacle that was worth getting up for. Say, you can't complain much about the summer thus far. Certainly not the heat anyway. Generally this is a far cry from the dry weather and scorching temperatures we've seen the last two summers. But August isn't here yet so let's knock on wood woodpecker style.

For your leisure time we've knocked out the monthly meetings for July and August. However, for your birding pleasure and edification we have scheduled a July 24 field trip to Craney Island in Portsmouth. As is the custom those wishing to go should meet that morning at 7:00 a.m. at the south parking lot of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center. Getting to Craney takes about an hour. Once there the group will drive around the five mile dredge spoil landfill and feast their eyes on the thousands of shorebirds that stop over there. Specialties include avocet, stilt sandpipers, horned larks, a possible peregrine falcon, and numerous gulls, terns, herons egrets and ibis. Black terns should be there. Phalaropes of the Wilson's ilk are usually there. Godwits should be looked for along with buff-breasted and curlew sandpipers. This excursion takes special arrangements by the leader and thus should have the representative attendance from our members. Plan to return home by 1:00 p.m. This is a great trip.

Early morning rains apparently wetted the appetites of those folks who were going on the June 20 field trip to Grandview Beach. Drowned may be more descriptive since no one went! This is unfortunate because the least (little) tern colony there was in peak production then. This year a total of 250 young were banded there as were 2 piping plover chicks. The colony was extremely successful in view of the disastrous high tides on the Eastern Shore that virtually eliminated many little tern colonies for the season. Becoming momentarily a part of the reproductive effort in a bird colony, especially one with better than 600 busy adults is a memorable experience. An ironic twist is apparent as supersonic jets winging overhead take the sound away from nature's own as they search for something secret and not just a morsel of minnow like their earnest little air-mates below.

The breeding effort of the herons, egrets, ibis, and gulls (herring, laughing, and great-black backed) seemed more than up to par during the June 20-24 survey of the colonial waterbirds on the Virginia Barrier Islands. These species did not seem to suffer the ravages of lots of June rain and an unusual series of high wind driven tides. The latter effectively wiped out black skimmer reproductive efforts for the month. Gull-billed and common terns were either renesting or with luck raising a few fortunate chicks. Royal terns seemed to be doing well though overall numbers were down a bit over previous seasons. Only four breeding sandwich terns could be accounted for. Unusually two possibly three pairs of Caspian terns were found, the normal number being one pair since 1974. (Incidentally I have found out that one of these Caspians is a bird that was banded as a chick on the Outer Banks!) White ibis were noted in two heronries though nesting could not be verified.

Every survey stint on the Eastern Shore has its highlights and 1982 will rank among the best in that regard. Wilson's petrels were encountered everyday out. Maximum counts approached twenty with five birds seen casually feeding in an inlet between Myrtle and Ship Shoal Islands. A sooty shearwater was found dead on Metomkin island and a dead fulmar was noted on Hog Island along with a 60 foot fin whale that had met the propeller blades of a large boat.

Perhaps the best finds of the trip were brown pelicans that were seen almost everyday. Up to eight were seen at one time on a couple islands. But the topper of them all was an adult white pelican (Steady Eddie?) in resplendent breeding condition, complete with a horn on his upper manible, hanging out in a waist-high marsh elder thicket where a couple hundred egrets and herons were nesting! Talk about looking out of place! Glancing up the beach 5 brown pelicans could be seen from the same spot. Few if any Virginia birders can claim seeing both North American pelicans at the same time in the Old Dominion.

Great horned owls were observed near the heron colonies on both Wreck and Fisherman Islands.

Mitchell Byrd reports that bald eagle nesting was much more successful than previously thought. Of the 40 some nests surveyed about 35 eaglets could be accounted for. A mid-summer flight up the James River located as many as 17 eagles in one area not far from Richmond. Why they are there is not certain. But we're glad they are!

Charlie Hacker reports that peregrine falcons at Assateague and Fisherman Island may yet incubate eggs. At least this is the feeling he and Dr. Byrd got in an early July check of the pairs along the Eastern Shore.

The Virginia Society Of Ornithology breeding bird foray to Bath County turned up several pairs of breeding mourning warblers and lots of golden-winged warblers. Nesting savannah sparrows were also located. Trip highlights included an extended look (twenty minutes) at a Mississippi kite, a bird that is very rare in the state, by three Roanoke birders, and a dying adult saw-whet owl found floundering in a road-way mud puddle.

John and Eleanor Hertz, Alice Springe, Carolyn Lowe, Teta Kain, and Betty Williams made a day trip to the Virginia Coast Reserve at Nassawadox on the Eastern Shore on June 30. They took a boat trip to Parramore and Hog Islands observing along the way nesting laughing gulls. Also greeting their eager eyes were marbled godwits and whimbrels, piping plovers and numerous herons, egrets and ibis. The return trip home produced brown pelicans seen from the Bridge Tunnel off Fisherman Island.

ASK OWL: The Sandwich tern gets its name from the village in Kent, England where the original "type" specimen was collected. The word "tern" comes from the Scandinavian terms for "sea swallow", terna, terne, therna and tärna.