

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER  
AUGUST 1982

The fabric of tidewater Virginia in August is traditionally woven of heat and humidity. Over the first weekend of this particular August local instrumentation tallied better than seven inches of humidity and as these words pour from the pen more measureable precipitation is accumulating outside! Bemoaning lack of such the last two Augusts, makes relevant a query about happy mediums. To a parched landscape water is a happy medium. To a tidewater August day its something to harass tourists!

There will be no bird club meeting this month to harass your last minute vacations. Remember though that we will revive the happy medium of learning the bird ways when the third Wednesday of September migrates through. Vice President Beck has already lined up an exciting entourage of Fall entertainment.

For those who choose the outdoor excursions provided monthly, Thom Blair has scheduled Sunday August 22 for us to peruse the wilds of Hog Island, Surry County way. The drawing cards for the outing include any, and hopefully all, of the herons, egrets, ibis, numerous shorebirds (including possible avocets, phalaropes, golden plovers) and the first vestiges of the landbird flight south-bound. Remember we leave the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center south parking lot at 7:00 a.m.

Last month's field trip to Craney Island in Portsmouth was a real success. The large flock of avocets was easily viewed from just beside the cars. Their magnificent plumage stood out handsomely against the spoil from which Craney derives its make-up. Also on hand were "gobs of peeps"-western, least, semipalmated stilt, spotted, pectoral sandpipers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, a Wilson's phalarope, sanderling, killdeer (with young!), semipalmated plover, long and short-billed dowitchers. The group saw least terns still feeding fluffy chicks, black skimmers, a very early northern harrier (marsh hawk) and shoveler ducks. Everyone agreed it was a super trip made even better by the knowledgeable and expert leadership of David Hughes who allowed us access to the area normally closed on weekends.

The grapevine has it that 3 peregrine falcons hatched in a nest at Chincoteague. It's been decades since Virginia had such an event and a large amount of credit is due to Mitchell Byrd and his co-workers who've been pacing about like expectant fathers since the nesting season began. Let's only hope the hatchings are a precedent to a population increase and establishment of peregrines in the Old Dominion.

Walt Fuerer, Cheatham Annex Ranger extraordinaire, reports that young turkey production this spring and summer was low. Baby turkeys literally don't have the brains to come in out of the rain and consequently the wet spring wreaked havoc on them. However, the pheasant crop is better than expected and parents sporting several chicks can easily be seen strolling along the avenues Walt creates for them amongst his wildlife crop foods.

Recent morning runs to Cheatham by Bill Sheehan have produced singing black and white warblers and on July 25 two pied-billed grebes.

Mark Lassiter, York River State Park's excellent leader, reports that a worm-eating warbler was present in the park throughout July. No evidence of breeding was noted, but then again that's a big park!

An unofficial rumor has leaked out of Kingsmill that a pair of Northern orioles may have nested there. If so this would be quite unusual for our area, though not really unexpected. We seem to keep so many with us during the winter that its only natural a few may want to take up residence here. Along the same lines young northern orioles were spotted at York River State Park in early July by David Hughes. The species nests sporadically over the Coast Plain becoming more regular north and west of our area.

We've all silently or openly cursed the day starlings became a part of the North American avifauna. If they've got a saving grace its only because they eat the refuse of man. Yet there may be an ecologically positive aspect to ole Sturnus vulgarus. I understand that they've been seen astride

deer at Kingsmill apparently removing parasites. Come on, Captain Sheehan, can't we count them now?

Paul Baker spent time last April in Israel on a raptor workshop observing the passage of European and Asian birds of prey. He said it was an incredible experience complementing observations of raptor flights he had witnessed in Egypt several years previous.

Now when one goes abirding during the summer in these parts it is a well known disaster to stray away from a paved or well cleared path. The local ticks and chiggers are on red alert to devour any warm blooded creature which isn't coated with armor or smothered in flowers of sulfur. Yet some individuals put themselves in situations in which a trip to chigger-chigger land is an unavoidable necessity. I speak here of an experienced lad, whose record keeping is known far and wide, who got out of his green bug to check some pips and squeaks at the cemetery on Jamestown Island's loop road. When he returned to the place he had left his bug he found the mechanical critter had joined its biological cousins in a roadside depression. Being the true sailor that he is our lad tip-toed through the tulips to retrieve his errant bug. In so doing he was set upon by hordes of red bugs, a malady that he was constantly reminded of for days or weeks thereafter. As I recall this same fellow had a bout with a three-leaved plant early in the spring. See any good birds, Sir?!

ASK OWL

The term semipalmated in certain shorebirds refers to the fact that there is partial webbing between the toes.

Don't forget-September marks the hawk flight counts. I need volunteers!