

The Williamsburg Flyer

September 1983

The school's have flung open their doors and Labor Day is past so summer must be over. In our society these two events signal the initiation of Fall. However, the thermometers and calendars remind us that summer has a couple of more weeks to carry on. Birds aren't really in to this seasonal change like we are. They have the option of packing up and heading to more constant climates to await the return of spring. In fact one wonders if many species ever experience any seasons except Springs and Summers. You gotta admire their style!

You'll admire the style of our September 21 club meeting. Our featured guest will be Mr. Ed Clark who is Director of the Shenandoah Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. Mr. Clark will speak to us about the center which specializes in the treatment of injured birds of prey as well as the appropriate care of any sick or damaged wild animal. This marvelous project has attracted much attention throughout the state and you should find the program most rewarding and informative. Remember we meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 of Millington Hall on the campus of William and Mary.

On Saturday, September 24 our monthly field trip will find us travelling to Kiptopeke on the Eastern Shore. Here one may assist in the hawk counts or help with the Virginia Society of Ornithology's bird banding operation. That weekend is right in the midst of peak warbler flights southward and a good cold front can literally have the trees swarming with passerines and the skies loaded with hawks. The trip home will feature stops on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel islands to look for exhausted migrants. You honestly never know what may be there. Lesser black-backed gulls have been regular in the last several years along with great cormorants. This adventure has been a big hit since the club formed so plan to attend. Departure time is 7:00 a.m. from the parking lot to the immediate right of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center on the Colonial Parkway side. We will car pool as much as possible to lessen the impact of \$18 in tolls. Plan on lunch and munchies for an all day affair and be prepared for the wind and chill since we'll be near water alot.

Don't forget that October 8 is Bird Seed Savings Day. Fred Blystone needs willing and able people to help dispense the goods on that Saturday. Call him at 229-4346 or catch him at the meeting on the 21st. I'm sure he'll accept orders then too. Stock up now for winter season.

The VSO annual Chincoteague field trip is September 16-18. If you are interested in more details on this fabulous birding weekend let me know. (229-0098).

The Canadian Wildlife Service has again color tagged breeding common terns from the lower Great Lakes area. They ask that any sightings be reported. I have the color codes and will be glad to forward any sightings anyone has. Be sure to note the date, location of the sighting, the tag color and its number if possible.

Our most recent purchase for the Williamsburg Regional Library is America's Most Favorite Backyard Birds by Kit and George Harrison.

The July-August edition of the Nature Conservancy News featured an article written in part by Mitchell Byrd concerning the reintroduction of peregrine falcons into the Old Dominion as breeding stock, a project our club has supported financially. Mitchell's work in Virginia combined with the efforts of many others throughout the

country has proven quite successful. In fact, two peregrines are being regularly observed at Hog Island in Surry County. Though these aren't breeders their presence is certainly an inspiration.

The prolific pen of Bill Snyder took a well deserved respite this summer as he lit out for the wilds of Alaska. His adventures brought him such bird goodies as mew gull, pigeon guillemot, violet-green swallow, gray jay and rock ptarmigan. He also encountered grizzly bears, gray fox, moose, caribou and elk. We all know Bill will somehow get his travels down on paper in some fashion for us to enjoy.

The August field trip to Craney Island was sweltering and dusty. Water was hard to find at the landfill and this made birding for shore birds quite difficult. Four of our members met Teta Kain and her Hampton Roads entourage for the venture. We did manage to locate 2 avocets, western and semipalmated sandpipers, horned larks, snowy egrets and a neat long-billed dowitcher. Not a bad morning considering the condition.

A late August trek to Chincoteague by Betty Williams and Leigh Jones was rewarding for both. They tallied marbled and hudsonian godits, mute swans, avocets, black terns, pectoral sandpipers, sika deer, glossy ibis and a number of least and semipalmated sandpipers. The inlet around Fisherman Island was dancing with large numbers of brown pelicans and there were sizeable gatherings of gull-billed terns hawking insects over the soy bean fields along Route 13.

For those folks who hung out humming bird feeders this summer there was no disappointment. Dick Hines had up to fifteen different birds while many other people had 3 to 5. Even non-birders melt a little at the antics of these incredible creatures, and they are a constant source of entertainment around feeders.

Virginia birders struck out en masse in mid-August to Scottsville, 20 miles south of Charlottesville. The object of attention was a perky and delightful burrowing owl. The little fellow had been officially noted on August 11 though it may have been around on the farm where it resided for months. Initially it was found by a lad out groundhog hunting. He knew something about birds and reported it to several skeptical birders around Charlottesville. Upon confirmation people came in from all over. Virginia's only other record for the species was a bird that landed on a ship off Cape Henry in October of 1918. Since the specimen was not saved the bird record has stood as hypothetical. That's true no more.

This owl marks the third rare one for Virginia this year. Remember the snowy owl in Waynesboro in January and the saw-whet owl in Hampton on March 21? Could this be the year for an owl grand slam?

While walking about on the farm at Scottsville where the owl had taken up residence in a pile of old cinder blocks (possibly a ground hog hole nearby) Brian Taber and Leigh Jones also saw a dickcissel, grasshopper sparrows and a large contingent of bank and cliff swallows. On their way back to Billsburg, Brian and Leigh found an upland sandpiper at Byrd Airport in Richmond.

It was great to hear that Barbara Ema is back on track after surgery this summer. She is a loyal field tripper and we'll be anxious to have her charming wit amongst us during the upcoming months.

Mitchell Byrd discovered a dead sora rail along the Colonial Parkway near Jamestown in early September. These sassy little marsh hens become common in our fresh water marshes until the first frost. Thereafter they are almost impossible to locate!

Rich Goll had a ruff time in New York State last month. In fact, the ruff he discovered made the state's bird hot-line. Why not bring one home to us Rich!

Ask Owl:

For the listers here's the scoop on the lumps and splits of avifauna according to the American Ornithologists Union 1983 checklist. Clean your lists up with this.

Lumps -

Bewick's swan and whistling swan are now tundra swan.

Mexican duck is now conspecific with the mallard!

Brown-throated wren is now conspecific with the house wren.

Yellow-green vireo is lumped with the red-eyed vireo.

The three rosy finches - gray crowned, black and brown capped - are now simply lumped as rosy finch.

Gray-head junco is now part of the dark-eyed junco complex.

These lumps cost owl 5 ticks on his list!

Splits -

Western screech owl is now distinct from the eastern screech owl.

Antillean nighthawk is split from the common nighthawk. This bird resides on the Keys in Florida.

The red-breasted sapsucker is now separated from the yellow-breasted sapsucker. The red-breasted sapsucker is found along the Pacific Coast.

Yellow-footed gull has been split from the western gull. Go look for it in Southern California.

Black-vented shearwater is distinct from the manx shearwater. This is a Pacific bird.

Couch's kingbird is a separate species from the tropical kingbird. The new species group resides in South Texas.

Black-backed wagtail is separated from the white wagtail. You'll have to go to the Aleutian's off Alaska to see this one.

Owl gains one on the splits.