

# THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

September 1984

The deathknell of "summer", Labor Day, has resounded. Rates return to reasonable levels and much of the natural world is left to those of us who really, seriously seek its rewards. The disinterested touristy ogglers have returned to their plastic-fantastic boobtubes, stored their "summer" equipment and have settled in for a long winter's nap with the NFL. Don't tell them what they're missing. They wouldn't understand.

If the truth be known, it's September again and time to migrate to Room 117 of Millington Hall on the campus of William & Mary the 19th at 7:30 p.m. The air should be full of talk about Bird Seed Savings Day, fall migrants and how to identify them and tall tales about how summer vacations were rendered incredible. In addition, the program for the meeting will be a Hawk Talk. With the prime time for raptor migration literally at our calendar's doorstep you'll be informed about the kinds of birds of prey that are prevalent at the state's hawk count stations. Emphasis will be made on hawk identification and raptor ecology and behavior. Birds of prey are constantly newsworthy items these days, so come on out and get an earful about these dynamic avian predators.

The field trip this month will take us to Newport News Park on Saturday September 29. As usual departure time for the excursion will be 7:00 a.m. Everyone is to assemble at the parking lot to the immediate right of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center on the Colonial Parkway side. Since the park is only a 15 minute jaunt from home and the trails are easily traversed there should be a large turnout to look for migrant landbirds. The varied habitats that will be checked may produce almost anything. Intend to attend, then join in!

We should all welcome Tracey Lean to our membership.

By the time of our September meeting we will have purchased our very own slide projector for use at club programs. Previously the club has relied on college-borrowed equipment. Now we won't have to go through the sign-out hassle and will have spare bulbs on hand in the event of a blow out.

It was with a sigh of relief that many of us read the recent news release that the southern tip of the Eastern Shore will become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Known as Cape Charles, and formerly occupied by an Air Force tracking station, the area is a haven for migrating birds especially small song-birds and birds of prey. Data gathered from over twenty years of bird banding at Kiptopeke, two miles to the north of Cape Charles, hawk counts and Christmas Bird Counts played a significant role in having the land set aside. To date the formal plans for the refuge haven't been finalized, but almost assuredly it will be managed with the utmost in avian considerations. Way to go birdwatchers!

How many of you knew that there were seven great blue heron colonies in the York-James City County area? Not only that the newest colony of the group was at Jamestown Island on "Goose Hill" and had 19 active nests this year. This data was gathered by Ruth Beck in her study of all the great blue heron colonies in Virginia, a project that is part of the state's nongame research program supported by tax donations.

Naturally every month has news about birds and August and September are especially productive in that respect. On August 17 Tom Armour toured Craney Island in Portsmouth and found 4 Wilson's phalaropes, numerous stilt sandpipers and several horned larks. After the passage of a cold front August 20 Dick Hines noted a male redstart in his yard in the Hamlet and said that 6-8 hummingbirds could be seen at his feeders at any one time. Teta Kain estimated that 80,000 purple martins were in the roost at Hampton on August 22.

The club field trip to Craney Island August 26 was attended by 18-20 people. The trip was quite rewarding with 5 Wilson's phalaropes, flocks of black skimmers and avocets, least terns feeding fledged young and a visit by a fleet peregrine falcon.

Cynthia Long visited a bluebird box on August 26 and found 5 eggs in it. Her greatest surprise came as she was counting the eggs one hatched! Now that's got to be something you could never forget!

A black and white warbler showed up on John and Betty William's feeder with a goldfinch on August 28. Looking somewhat misplaced it departed for the trunk of a nearby oak to probe for insects, a much more suitable buffet for warblers than a feeder full of seeds.

Leigh Jones, Bryan Taber and his Dad shrugged off the holiday traffic September 3 and made the rounds of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel islands. Interesting finds included a black scoter (early), a Nashville warbler, a marsh wren and fly-by cliff swallows.

Over at Kiptopeke, the bird banding operation began its 22nd year September 1. Morning skies were a flutter with hundreds of kingbirds, large groups of cedar waxwings and quite an assortment of warblers. Only a mere trickle of migrant hawks was recorded. On the evening of the first 17 nighthawks (bullbats) were seen at Oyster and on the next evening 44 marbled godwits, a dozen whimbrels and about 300 oystercatchers were observed off Smith Island as they awaited the outgoing tide to expose the mudflats.

Don't forget to "tell a friend" about Bird Seed Savings Day October 6, 1984. We need as many people as possible to help with distribution of the seed on that day, so please let Fred Blystone (229-4346) know you can lend a hand.

One final note from Fred. Don't wait until the night of the September 19 meeting to place your order. Place them in advance. Fred must get his requests in prior to the meeting so make a special effort to give him as much prior notice as possible.

The U.S. Congress has voted October 7-13 as National Bird of Prey Week. Finally, the stigma of villain may be lifted from the hawks and owls as the nation renders them official recognition.

Bettye Fields reports that the Ake-Dumont pelagic trip of Labor Day weekend produced the usual black-capped petrels and an unexpected masked booby. A solar polar skua was also seen that weekend.

Mary Pulley relates that brown pelicans have recently been seen in Mathews County. And finally, a yellow-headed blackbird was recently observed flying by Kiptopeke on the Eastern Shore.

#### Ask Owl:

In Bermuda land crabs had become such a problem that the island's conservation officer, David Wingate, thought he would combat them with a natural predator. He re-established yellow-crowned night herons there as breeders and they are doing the job.

Flocks of gulls that roost on airport runways have been a safety hazard for decades. All manner of scare tactics have been used to run them off with little success. Now at Toronto's International Airport a firm called Birdstrike is making the gulls an offer they can't refuse. Peregrine falcons are used and the gulls, natural food for the falcons, "run for their lives."