

# THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

August 1984

Now that you've spent the first two weeks of the month going for the gold (as it were) its time to come back to reality at home. With no monthly meeting to attend you can set your sights on August 26 (Sunday) for our Craney Island field trip. We will depart for the one hour drive over there at 7:00 a.m. from the usual meeting place in the parking lot to the immediate right of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center on the Colonial Parkway side. Car-pooling will be necessary. Wear cool, comfortable clothing and bring munchies and something cold to drink. Home again, home again jiggit-jig should be around noon to 1:00 p.m.

Craney Island is an Army Corps of Engineers dredge spoil site for Hampton Roads harbor. It simply is a vast area of bottom deposits from the harbor, pocked by pools of water and vegetation which attract myriad shorebirds and hundreds of gulls, terns and skimmers. A large flock of avocets seems to reside there and is actually the only reliable place in the whole state to see them. Birds that will be especially looked for and should be found include pectoral, western, stilt and semipalmated sandpipers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, black-bellied and semipalmated plovers, royal, Caspian, Forster's, common, least and black terns, short-billed dowitchers and several of the herons and egrets. Possible birds include white-rumped and curlew sandpipers, northern and Wilson's phalaropes, golden plover, marbled godwit and common gallinule. This is a fine trip to learn shorebirds so make every effort to be there.

The remainder of the field trips for the year look like this:

September 29 (Sat.) - Newport News Park

October 20 (Sat.) - Kiptopeke & CBBT Islands

November 25 (Sun.) - Back Bay Wildlife Refuge

December - Christmas Count - date to be assigned

Remember, the third Wednesday in September begins our regular monthly meetings. Cynthia Long has put together an entertaining series of programs for us so don't miss out.

The Sulton of Seed, Fred Blystone (also our club Treasurer) wants everyone to be ready for his post Labor Day mailing of Bird Seed Savings Day information. You'll get an extra copy of the order form and you are urged to pass it on to a friend or colleague who hasn't purchased seed from us previously. Spread the bird word and make plans for your early Fall and Winter seed needs for the bird feeders.

Please welcome Dr. Barbara Moorman of Indian Springs Road to our group.

Check your bird lists for these: collared manakin, boat-billed flycatcher, giant cowbird, black-faced grosbeak. Can't find 'em, huh? That's because they're in Mexico, gringo. Todd Mathes, an eleventh grader at Lafayette High School, reported these in to Leigh Jones, his field biology teacher, via postcard this summer. We hope Todd found other interesting birds there and didn't run get ravaged by the water.

John and Eleanor Hertz spent some time in Maine and were delighted by the presence of the breeding eider ducks. Get down!

On the breeding bird front a lot has been going on. Tom Armour has found one, possibly two, pairs of grasshopper sparrows at Kingsmill. This species is poorly reported from our area. It requires essentially unutilized fallow, grassy fields for nesting. In this area a field is either cultivated or built upon as fast as its cleared so this sparrow has little chance to make a go of breeding.

The eastern Kingbirds (colloquially, Betty martins) are still raising young in cypress trees on the Chickahominy River. As bank, barn and tree swallows flit by already in migration Dick Hines has found two kingbird nests with feathered, though fuzzy, young. One was on Buzzards Bay and the other near Yarmouth Creek. Both nests are only 6 to 7 feet over the water. The eastern kingbird is an early migrant, as well, and by the end of this month large "flocks" of them can be seen passing over the Eastern Shore. Those little ones better hurry!

A pied-billed grebe nest was located on the Piedmont of Virginia this summer and double-crested cormorants have nested for the second time ever in the state near Westover Plantation east of Richmond. Several pairs of cattle egrets are nesting with the cormorants. Purple martins are just about gone from many of their nest boxes and should be "staging" for the migration to come. One wonders whether there will be an immense concentration of tens of thousands of them in Hampton again this summer.

A scissor-tailed flycatcher, apparently an adult, made a three day stopover in Westmoreland County beginning July 12. These birds have a history of being ephemeral when they are located in Virginia, and unfortunately no alert could be generated for this bird and only a few lucky Westmorelanders got to see it.

Bryan Taber, Tom and Jeanne Armour, Bill Sheehan, Ruth Beck and Leigh Jones made a field trip to Chincoteague on August 9. They were fortunate enough to see a ruff, white-rumped sandpipers and a Hudsonian godwit. They were even fortunate enough to see a cattle egret perched temporarily on a deer's head!

Also on August 9 a male ruddy duck, still in breeding plumage was seen on Queens Creek near By-Pass Road.

The Virginia Society of Ornithology Board of Directors met for a planning session July 20-22 in Warm Springs, Va. Teta Kain, VSO Secretary, and Ruth Beck, a Board member and Site Guide committee chairperson attended. Dr. Jerry Via of Blacksburg assumed his duties of VSO President and conducted lively discussions on a broad range of state ornithological topics. Naturally, the Breeding Bird Atlas was a major item, not only because everyone there is very involved in it but because there are still a few bugs to be worked out of this first of five years for the effort.

The Society's membership broke the 800 barrier this year and a goal of 900 is set for 1984-85. We encourage any of our club members who want to join this very dynamic organization to do so. I will be glad to furnish you with any information you need (229-0098).

The 1985 VSO annual meeting will be held in Staunton. They will have a tough act to follow after the success of the Hampton Roads Bird Club in May 1984. Farmville and Longwood College will host the 1986 meeting and in 1987 the responsibility for the extravaganza falls on our shoulders. Not only that we are going to invite the Maryland Ornithological Society to join us! Our work must begin now!

The 1984 VSO trip to Chincoteague will take place September 14-16. Headquarters for the weekend will be the Refuge Motor Inn in Chincoteague. This has been one of the best field trips the VSO offers. The Eastern Shore in September is dynamite for birds and this year a special feature will be "Bike and Bird". Try to attend if you want the birding experience of the late summer migration. It's awesome.

Listers lament. Here's a list of first ever sightings in North America for 1984. Pack your bags, you miss some!

March 13-15 Texas - White-throated robin

April 28 - Florida - Yucatan Vireo

May 20 - Texas - Greenish Elaenia

Other goodies - Texas, blue buntings March 15 and in New Jersey a fork-tailed flycatcher May 19.

Benton Basham of Tennessee set an all-time record by seeing 711 species of birds in North America in 1983. Oh, thank heaven for 711!

Ask Owl:

Nesting studies of the purple martin in Texas in the mid 1970's produced an interesting side light. A manufacturer of aluminum martin houses has billed that their structures would provide better breeding success for martins than conventional wooden houses or gourds. Data from the studies in fact proved there was no significant benefit to the martins' breeding success by nesting in an aluminum house versus a wooden house. However, the study recommended aluminum houses since they were easier to maintain.