

## THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

July 1984

How have you spent your summer vacation? Huh? For the lucky few summer 1984 has been a chance to explore the far flung corners of the earth. Ty and Julie Hotchkiss spent time in Africa seeing over 400 species of birds and better than sixty mammal species. The Armours made a journey to Europe while Leigh Jones sought adventure in the desert southwest of California, Arizona and Utah. Some of her birds of note included Clark's nutcracker, pine grosbeak and dipper. Rich Goll, Cindy Fletcher, Dot Silsby and Bettye Fields joined Bob Ake of Old Dominion University and had a delightful trek to Churchill, Manitoba and a tour of North Dakota. Churchill is located 450 miles from the Arctic circle and is at the southern edge of the true tundra. It's billed as the "Polar Bear Capitol of the World" sitting right on the Hudson Bay where the bears make their migrations along the ice and shore in search of seals. Churchill is also the home of beluga whales. These animals are about 20 feet long as adults and whiter than snow!

Birdwise the Churchill group saw excellent species, the highlight being a nesting Ross' Gull. This extremely rare bird has been breeding near the town the last several years and birders from everywhere have flocked in to see them. This year only four birds were on hand. The subtle rosy pink body touched by a black necklace make the Ross' gull breathtaking. In all, the trip list had 11 species of gull including Sabine's, Thayer's and Little.

The complete trip list for the group hit an unofficial 246 species. Besides the gulls other goodies included sharp-tailed and sage grouse, willow ptarmigan, gray (Hungarian) partridge, hoary redpoll, a nesting northern three-toed woodpecker, Arctic loon, at-your-feet yellow rails, parasitic jaeger, Violet-green swallow, lazuli bunting, Baird's and Harris' sparrow, all four longspurs (Smith's, McCown's, Lapland and chestnut-collared), 18 warbler species, 17 sparrow species, 27 different mammals, a host of beautiful wildflowers and incredible iceberg scenery. Evidence of nesting was found for at least 43 of the bird species seen. It's an odd sight to see Bonaparte's gulls nesting in spruce trees!

Brian Taber made some excursions of his own in late May and early June. A May foray to Highland County gave B.T. mourning warbler and saw-whet owl. A couple of weeks later on the Outer Banks he saw a Mississippi kite! Stellar!

The July 8 field trip to Cheatham Annex made no earth shaking finds although the duty turkeys were on hand to save the day for leaders Bill Sheehan and Leigh Jones.

Remember our next club field trip is scheduled for Sunday August 26 to Craney Island. This is prime time for shorebirds, so make a note to be there.

Red-headed woodpeckers have apparently taken up residence in their old haunts locally. Where they went for the winter or why they went is a mystery. Carolyn Lowe has them coming to her birdfeeder at Camp Peary to snatch sunflower seeds and several have been seen behind Queen's Lake School and on Jamestown Island.

The York River State Park staff are conducting bird walks during the summer. from 6:00-7:00 A.M. on the following dates: July 17, 28 and 31. There is no admission charge.

The major thrust of birding activity this summer, aside from vacation jaunts, has centered around the Virginia Society of Ornithology's Breeding Bird Atlas Project. In conjunction with this and an ongoing ten year study of the colonial waterbirds of the Virginia Barrier Islands, Ruth Beck, Jerry Via (VSO President) and Bill Akers (least tern expert) scoured the islands of the Eastern Shore in

mid-June. Sizeable colonies of herring gulls, laughing gulls (one colony on Wreck Island had an estimated 15,000 birds in it) black skimmer, royal, Sandwich, least, gull-billed, common and Forster's terns were located. In addition data was gathered on the nesting herons, glossy ibis (no white ibis were seen this year) and egrets. A white pelican was again (3 years in a row) in a heronry on Metomkin Island and brown pelicans (up to 241 on Fisherman Island) were seen daily. For the eleventh year in a row Caspian terns nested and were seen daily. Even some black, flyffy clapper rail chicks were found. Ruth was keen eyed enough to find a nighthawk nest.

Elsewhere the breeding bird study has had a few surprises. Ruth confirmed a logger-head shrike nest south of the James River. Paul Baker had a Carolina wren stake out a box in his garage as breeding territory and Leigh Jones and Bill Sheehan discovered a black-billed cuckoo (though no nesting evidence has been found) near Yorktown on July 12. This species normally is found in the mountains and valleys during the summer.

Chuck Rosenberg, a William and Mary graduate student who won one of our scholarship stipends this year, was also the recipient of the VSO's prestigious J.J. Murray Award. Chuck's study of barn owls was recently featured on a Richmond television station's evening news. He has found 7-10 owls on Curles Neck Farm as well as one pair each at Lee Hall and Langley. Keep up the fine work Chuck!

Mitchell Byrd's summer survey of bald eagles along the James River turned up forty-one of them in early June. This tally is almost 50-50 adults to immatures and evidence seems to indicate these birds are part of the Florida population which breed much earlier in the year and then disperse northward in summer.

The common tern, black skimmer colony on the Hampton Roads tunnel had an estimated 900 terns and 120 skimmers there in late June. Admidst all that boat and car traffic the birds are essentially free from disturbance on the south island and are apparently thriving!

Dick Hines saw a least bittern near Gordon's Creek on the Chickahominy River June 30 and Fenton Day scoped out a greater shearwater off Metomkin Island on the Eastern Shore in early July.

Hawk watch time is just around the corner and the VSO's annual trip to Chincoteague has been set for September 14-16.

The schedule for summer and fall Ake-Dumont pelagic trips from Hatteras North Carolina is as follows: July 29, September 1 and 2, October 6 and 7. Cost is \$48 per person per trip. If you need more information let me know (229-0098).