

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER
June 1986

There has been little reported in the way of bird or birder activity since the last newsletter, perhaps because migration was at it's peak in early May. Also, birders are settling down after the flurry of activity which surrounds the Spring movement of birds. People, I guess, are resting up for Fall by mowing lawns, barbequeing and drinking lemonade.

The heat and humidity have returned which means that singing birds are reduced to wood thrushes, red-eyed vireos and towhees. There is still much work to be done on the Virginia Atlas Project, however, as birders record signs of nesting throughout Virginia.

The 1986 Virginia Society of Ornithology Foray will concentrate on the summer birdlife of Tazewell County. Special attention will be given to Burkes Garden, a round valley at 3100 feet. The dates are from June 17 to June 22. Attempts will be made to cover the areas that were worked when the foray was held there in 1972, so that comparisons can be made. A copy of the foray prospectus can be obtained from the Director Dr. Richard H. Peake, Jr., Clinch Valley College, Wise, Virginia 24292. Headquarters will be John's Motel, Tazewell.

On the local bird scene, as I mentioned there have been few reports. Cuckoos still are not singing much, nor are they in evidence flying from tree to tree in search of caterpillars. I wonder if the drought has interrupted the usual sequence of things and is responsible for the apparent quiet season. There were warblers still moving through during the last week of May including yellow warblers and Cape May. Oddly enough, we have no breeding records of yellow warbler in our local area, though there are many in nearby coastal areas. Most of the siskins had departed by about May 20.

The most significant activity around yards and neighborhoods is the dedicated work of parent birds as they incubate eggs and feed mates and young. Cardinals, towhees, catbirds, wrens, robins and jays put on a very entertaining show in June as the young birds make bizarre sounds and flutter wings in an attempt to gain attention---those of us with children are used to this.

I did receive a letter from Mrs. Margret Dunham who sent an article from the Massachusettes Audubon Society on the care of young wild birds. It contains some interesting information which I will try to summarize and pass along. First, it is illegal to have mature wild birds in your possession. Exceptions include introduced species, including the European starling, rock dove and house sparrow.

In addition, it is inhumane. Very few nesting birds in the care of inexperienced people survive to adulthood. People often actually inflict a great deal of suffering unintentionally. Bird life is very different from human life and a high mortality rate is normal. If we teach children that this is harsh or cruel we are not helping them to understand the roles of different life forms in nature.

What we can teach ourselves and our children, who are very interested and curious about such things, is that is wonderful to be concerned with wildlife and we can encourage further study. The use of pesticides and the quality of our environment are issues that are linked to curiosity about the life and death of young wild birds. We can congratulate ourselves on our thoughtfulness and talk to children about their feelings on

such matters. Encouraging interest is great, but encouraging intervention is generally not helpful.

A few things that are recommended include moving birds off of the roadways so that parents can find and help the bird, and replacing young birds in nearby nests. I thank Mrs. Dunham and the Audubon Society for this information.

Tom Armour has been observing young red-shouldered hawks, young wood ducks and young Canada geese at Kingsmill. Crested flycatchers visited his nest box which is 15 feet up on a tree, but although they carried nesting material, they seem to have left without completing a nest. Ruth Beck reports that great blue herons have young now and the least terns are doing well at Grandview Beach in Hampton.

The bird club picnic on May 17 was a success according to coordinator Betty Williams. There were 27 participants who enjoyed good food and company by the York River. The temperature was high, but a good breeze kept things comfortable. Above the shelter the group observed scarlet tanagers, summer tanagers and yellow-throated warblers. We all owe Betty a big thank you for a well-organized and fun event.

I went on a fishing boat out of Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach on May 21st to look for seabirds. These "party boats" carry fishermen out to the sunken wrecks to fish for black sea bass. They go out about 30 miles and are interesting trips for non-fishing birders. There were very few birds that day but some highlights included 2 arctic terns that were calling, one non-breeding plumaged red phalarope, a parasitic jaeger and three Wilson's petrels. Barn swallows were seen at 30 miles out as were a few dolphins. The seas were calm for most of the day and a late afternoon thunderstorm was nothing short of spectacular. I have information about other pelagic trips in Virginia and North Carolina planned for this summer.

I want to thank everyone for continuing to contribute to the newsletter. As always, contact Brian Taber at 104 Druid Court, Williamsburg, or call at 253-1181 with information of interest to club members.

The field trip for June will be something a little different. On June 18th, I will be leading a half day trip on a fishing boat leaving from Virginia Beach. We will be 10-15 miles offshore looking for petrels and shearwaters. The cost is \$15.00 per person. Anyone who is interested in coming should call me to arrange for reservations. These trips are always interesting regardless of the weather and birdlife.

The July field trip will be held on July 26th and will go to Hog Island in Surry County. Please meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Information Center parking lot and we'll be catching the 7:35 ferry to Surry. Shorebirds are expected and last July 2 wood storks were there.

Bird of the Season: Great Crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus crinitus*

The crested flycatcher, common in our area, belongs to a family known as Tyrant flycatchers and a genus called *Myiarchus*. It is the only *Myiarchus* to be expected east of the Mississippi. The crested, as well as some other members of the genus, is olive-brown above with a grayish throat and bright hellow belly. The wings and tail contain a bright cinnamon color which flashes as the bird flies. There are also whitish wing bars. The bird is 7-8 inches long and has a very distinctive ascending call note, sounding something like "wheeeep".

Cresteds, unlike kingbirds, which are similar flycatchers, like to

perch in the shade and often give their song and call note while hidden in the forest canopy. They are cavity nesters, often using bird boxes as well as dead trees.

The preferred food is flying insects, although in fall, fruit is taken as well. Crested flycatchers breed in the eastern United States and southeastern Canada migrating in winter to Florida, Mexico and South America.