

The Williamsburg Flyer

June, 1987

We were overdue for good Spring weather and for our 10th Spring Count on May 3rd, it could not have been better. Temperatures were in the mid-eighties and the morning clouds soon gave way to clear skies. By eight o'clock that night, however, a fierce thunderstorm had rumbled through, sending temperatures down. The following day was thirty-five degrees colder and rainy. Congratulations to the two dozen birders who covered our eight areas so well. Once again, each group contributed significantly.

We were joined this year by a reporter, Mike Lake, who was doing a story on the count for the *Virginia Gazette*. Mike is also interested in becoming a club member. The total for the day was one short of our all-time high of 162 set last year. **We have five species never before reported on a Spring Count.** They were Cerulean Warbler, Mute Swan, Common Merganser, Merlin and the highlight of the day, an incredible sighting of an American Swallow-tailed Kite at Riverview Plantation on the York River. The kite was the first ever for our area. We had 22 warblers and an impressive 15 species of raptors. In our area, the week before the count and including the day after, were many more birds including Sora, Black-necked Stilt, Little Blue Heron, Glossy Ibis, Pintail, Common Nighthawk, Tennessee Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler and Bay-breasted Warbler. Thanks again to all who contributed to an exciting and successful day.

Carolyn Lowe and Joy Archer who served on the Registration Committee; Cynthia Long who was in charge of Publicity and Cindy Carlson who organized the exhibits.

Many hours of service were combined to handle the many details, large and small, that were involved in the production of a conference which accommodates about two hundred participants. Highlights of the event will appear in the July newsletter.

Also, it should be noted that the VSO Nominating Committee will present a slate of officers at the Conference. On the slate are our own Bill Williams for President and Dr. Mitchell Byrd as a three year board member.

BIRD SEED SALE

Our Club will be making a major push to boost bird seed sales this fall. We are suggesting that Club members tell their friends about our sale and about our Club in order to generate as much interest as possible. The seed sale allows our Club to do things that many other clubs cannot do. Our library donations and college student research scholarships are made possible by our profits. Other ideas include cooperation with retail stores in distributing our seed ordering information. I would be happy to hear from anyone who has suggestions about increasing sales and I will pass the ideas along to the people in charge.

Let's make the next sale in October the best ever!

There will be no field trip for June due to the VSO activities. The July field trip will be announced in the next newsletter. The Club does not schedule club programs for June, July or August.

The recipient of this year's research grant scholarship is graduate student and past Club President, Bob Cross. Bob will put the grant into his work on the Eastern Shore Piping Plovers. In the coming year, he will present a program to the Club, about his efforts.

Congratulations, Bob!



VSO 1987

Speaking of success, our club has nearly completed the work needed to host the Virginia Society of Ornithology Annual Conference. A special thank you needs to be said for the many members who served in the various capacities. Some of the key people included Ruth and Bill Williams who served on the Arrangements Committee; Dr. Mitchell Byrd, Cynthia Long and Julie Hotchkiss who served on the Program Committee; Fred Blystone who organized the Finance Committee; Bill Williams who was in charge of the Field Trip Committee; Barbara Moorman, Betty Williams and Stalma Hacker who staffed the Hospitality Committee;

The following is an update by Carolyn Lowe on the Williamsburg West habitat:

"Our efforts to persuade the developers of Ford's Colony to protect the bird habitat behind Williamsburg West have met with partial success. Drew Mulhare, project engineer, has informed us that the access road to Longhill will cross Chisel Run Creek at the northern end of the pond, as we recommended, which will lessen the impact of traffic on the wetland habitat. He said this crossing will involve a somewhat higher cost to Ford's Colony than an alternative route, but that environmental values were considered in making the decision. Also, the road alignment has been modified to allow a wider vegetated buffer east of the pond which will provide more protection against runoff.

Our other recommendations -- not to deepen the pond or disturb its aquatic vegetation and to establish a deeper setback along the western perimeter of the wetland to mitigate disturbance of nesting populations of Wood Ducks and Red-headed Woodpeckers -- are still under consideration. The developers have expressed interest in further input from the Bird Club members and other concerned citizens as they proceed with their plans. And, according to Mr. Mulhare, they are putting more emphasis on the natural assets at Ford's Colony, including wildlife, as part of the appeal to prospective residents. We'll continue to monitor the situation and report on any further developments."

MAY PROGRAM

The May Club program was a delightful lecture and visual experience given by Dorothy Mitchell of Newport News.

Her time spent as a bird bander in her own yard and at Kiptopeke is well known. We saw slides of flowers, plants and birds showing intricate details and vivid colors. We learned about foliage that attracts wildlife including insects, turtles and of course, birds. One disturbing fact was that the number of birds banded since 1970 has been decreasing. I feel certain that her enthusiasm rubbed off on this audience as it has on so many others.

BIRD OF THE SEASON:

American Swallow-tailed Kite
Elanoides forficatus

The kite found on our Spring Count last month represented the first ever for our area. Each year or so, one is seen in Virginia. Other locations have included the Dismal Swamp, Augusta County, Fairfax County and Back Bay. This bird, with long, pointed wings and mobile, forked tail has a very distinctive shape for a large bird. The white head and underparts are offset by black upperparts making a striking image. The flight is light and graceful with much swooping and soaring.

Though some birds wander to Canada, the normal breeding range is from South Carolina southward through the states that border the Gulf Coast. The preferred habitat is wooded river swamps where the birds glide just over treetop level or fly slowly over the ground searching for rodents, large insects and snakes. Swallow-tailed Kites often feed on the wing and are amazingly adept aerialists. Consequently, these raptors are rarely seen for long outside of their usual range. The birds are less numerous than in the past, largely due to restriction of its habitat by the practice of draining swamps and marshes and the cutting of associated trees.

The nest is built very high up in a tree near water. Twigs and moss are mainstays of the rather loose platform. In winter, the Swallow-tailed Kite withdraws to Central and South America.

Please welcome new Club members . . .

Joan Somerville and Elizabeth Elliott.



SIGHTINGS

In other news, Dick Hines observed a Peregrine Falcon at the Yorktown Bridge on May 13th. The bird has reportedly been chasing pigeons and gulls in the vicinity. Rich also reported two Black-crowned Night-Herons on the Chickahominy River on Easter.

Rare birds in the region in May included Spotted Redshank in the Hatteras, Curlew, Sandpiper at Chincoteague and Sandhill Crane near Harrisonburg.

The Least Tern colony at Grandview Beach in Hampton is doing well again this year, however, the birds have had to be alert to a Peregrine Falcon which has been seen in the colony. On May 31st, the falcon was seen by Bill Akers and me flying with an adult Least Tern in its talons.

An excursion was made by Rich Goll, Cindy Carlson, Cecilia and Bill Williams to Highland County and to the mountains near Roanoke during the weekend following Memorial Day. Memorable birds of the trip included Vesper Sparrow, Ruffed Grouse, Least Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler and Mourning Warbler.



To submit information for the newsletter, please contact Brian Taber at 253-1181 or write to 104 Druid Court, Williamsburg.

THE WALL STREET JOU

