

The Williamsburg Flyer

July, 1987

Did you ever wonder why there's not a lot of bird news in July? I did. I looked for the answer and found several. Of course, Spring migration is well over with and the trees have leafed out completely, making it difficult to see any but the most common and conspicuous birds. Only a few birds such as Red-eyed Vireos, Wood Thrushes and Towhees can even be heard above the noise of summer traffic and lawnmowers. The birders are off to more exotic locales for vacation, seeing Steller's Jays, Green Jays, Brown Jays, Ant-Shrikes and Bee-Eaters. Those who don't leave are left to count English Sparrows by the pool and Starlings on the lawn by the barbeque.

Air conditioned homes draw people inside, perhaps to watch the hummingbird feeder or to catch the avian fare on television. During one recent week, the selection was very poor. Of course, there was "Nature" and "National Geographic Explorer," "World of Audubon" and "Wild America", but few other shows had anything to offer.

There was the Ground Dove on the 15th fairway on the Professional Golfer's Tour, the Barn Swallows darting around the stadium at the Cub's game, the background bird noises during "Tarzan" and "Little House on the Prairie". There were the Baltimore Orioles, Big Bird on "Sesame Street" and last, but not least, Peewee Herman. Eastern, Western, or Greater Peewee? Who knows?

I suggest getting out to the places that make summer birding rewarding, such as lakes and ponds, the mountains and the shore. Atlassing, too, gets people out to examine local areas for evidence of breeding birds.



Everyone from planners to participants seemed to have high praise for this year's Virginia Society of Ornithology Annual Conference. Following days of very hot and sticky weather, the weekend of June 5, 6 and 7 could not have been better. It was even almost chilly on the Jamestown Ferry as groups traveled to Hog Island in Surry County and to see Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in Sussex County. Other field trips headed for Newport News Park, Grandview Beach, Jamestown Island, Cheatham Annex, Craney Island and to various atlassing blocks.

Some of the highlights included Barred Owl, Sandwich Tern, Turkey, Clapper Rail complete with nest and chick, Least Tern, Least Bittern, Piping Plover, Prothonotary Warbler, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Bonaparte's Gull, Bald Eagle and White-rumped Sandpiper. I expect many more good birds were seen, but I have not yet seen the final tally. I will try to report on that later. The June dates proved to be an excellent choice for this year's conference, with a great variety of interesting birds.

There were compliments about the organization and atmosphere of the weekend and rave reviews for the local program on Friday night. Perhaps the show will be put on for our club some month. The banquet was well attended as we were ushered in by the Fife and Drum Corps then serenaded by a balladeer and a violinist. The after dinner speaker, Dr. Judith McIntyre, presented slides and a moving children's program on the plight of the Common Loon.

The scientific paper session was held on Saturday in Millington Hall and the exhibits were well attended as people examined books, binoculars, carvings and other bird associated items. Registration went smoothly and the new, updated annotated checklist of Virginia's birds was officially presented.

*Congratulations again to everyone involved:
to outgoing president Jerry Via and his officers
and to incoming president, Bill Williams and his
staff!*

SIGHTINGS

A Cinnamon Teal has been reported at Chincoteague for what could be a first state record, if the bird is determined to be wild and not escaped.

An American Avocet was seen at Hog Island, Surry County on 6/25/87 for only the eighth record. Scarlet Tanagers and Yellow-throated Warblers have been singing at Lake Powell during late June.

The Barrier Island Colonial Bird Survey conducted by Bill Williams, Jerry Via and Bill Akers through the Nature Conservancy, was completed again in June. This year, Brown Pelican nests were found for the first time, representing the farthest northward expansion of the huge birds following their severe decline not so long ago. Two Roseate Terns were found among lots of other terns and gulls for a very special treat. Also seen were Piping Plovers, Wilson's Plovers, Marbled Godwits, four pairs of Caspian Terns, a Common Eider, Common Scoter, Bufflehead, White Pelican and possibly an albinistic glossy ibis - an unusual beige bird. This survey has continued for over a decade and is providing a wealth of information about one of the premiere nesting areas to be found anywhere.

In other news, Dick Hines and Bill Williams have been hearing a Least Bittern and seeing many Ospreys on the Chickahominy.

There is a new nesting species for the Washington, D.C. area. Least terns have begun nesting on the roof of the Kennedy Center there. Two Golden Eagles were reported at Dickey Ridge on the Skyline Drive in late June and a possible Brown Booby was observed near Wallops Island headed toward Chincoteague.

Plans are in the works for this fall's bird seed sale. Fred Blystone is checking into information about items and ordering. As mentioned last month, our seed sales have been down in the last two years and we want to have a **super sale**. Please check with friends, relatives and neighbors to spread the word about our products and take down the names of interested people so that we can send them an order blank. We are again hoping to distribute in early October.

The July field trip will be led by Bill Williams on Saturday, July 25th. Please meet at the Information Center (as usual) at 7:30 AM for an excursion to Hog Island and perhaps other nearby hotspots. July can be a rewarding time for those who are able to get out. Some shorebirds are already making their way back from Canadian nesting spots, while southern birds are having post-breeding dispersal in a northerly direction. It was July when the two Wood Storks were first found at Hog Island in 1985.

BIRD OF THE SEASON

Barn Swallow
Hirundo rustica

In summer in our area and throughout much of the Northern Hemisphere, the Barn Swallow is seen commonly over open areas as it searches for flying insects. Like other swallows, it is a graceful flyer with very small feet, a small bill, but a very wide gape. It is the swallow with the long forked tail and the only one with white tail spots.

It is blue-black above and buffy below with a cinnamon throat. The rapid flight is sometimes very low, with little gliding. At the end of the wing stroke, the primary feathers almost point directly backwards. It is seen near habitation as it has become used to building its mud and grass nests on vertical and horizontal structures of buildings and bridges. Unlike many land birds, it is a daytime migrant, passing to the Southern Hemisphere in late summer and fall.

The almost constant twittering call is given while flying. Occasionally, they are seen resting on wires above open fields. They occur in large flocks often with swifts and other species of swallows.

To submit information for the newsletter, contact

Brian Taber at 253-1181
or

write to 104 Druid Court, Williamsburg