

WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

SUMMER 1989

The speaker for the September meeting is **Paul Saunier, Jr.** from Charlottesville and his program is **"Identifying Hawks Migrating Through Virginia—from a Layman's Perspective."** The meeting will be on **September 20th, 7:30 p.m., in Room 117 in Millington Hall.**

The **August field trip will be on Saturday, the 19th.** We will be going to **Craney Island,** in Portsmouth to see migrating shorebirds. Please assemble by **8:00 a.m. at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center.** We should return by **3:00 p.m.**

Letter from the Editor—

I hope that everyone's summer has been filled with plenty of rest, relaxation, and birds. Although rest and relaxation are unfounded concepts for me this season, the birds have been but a small part of a very rewarding college "vacation". I started the summer with my usual week long trip to Wassaw Island where I have worked with Loggerhead Seaturtles for seven years. Wassaw is a virtually uninhabited barrier island off the coast of Savannah, Georgia. I was rewarded this summer with the largest variety of avefauna that I have yet to see there in a weeks time. Woodstorks, Great White Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Snowy Egrets, Tri-colored Herons, Green-backed Herons, and Little Blue Herons, were common waders in both inland ponds and saltmarshes. Willets were nesting in the grasses near our beach pond and foraged along the tides' edge with a large variety of other shorebirds—from Sanderlings to Semi-palmated Plovers. Black-skimmers and Brown Pelicans cruised the seas. Osprey, Bald Eagles, and Red-shouldered Hawks screamed as they made their culinary crusades from ocean edge to oak-wooded interior. As I lead my crew along the beach at night in search of the so damnly elusive seaturtles, the calls of Chuck-wills widows and Great-horned owls mixed with the crashing waves.

After returning to the Burg for the briefest time, I was once again off. This time I was starting my first of ten weeks in a national leadership program called Leadership America. I am one of fifty college students from across the country selected to participate in the class of 1989. It is evident that I am the only biologist in the group as my nickname has come to be "Nature Chick". Meant as a compliment or not, I'll take it as one. Our program began with a three day orientation at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina and was promptly followed by a week at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, N.C. After this intensive week of leadership psychology I was more than ready to fly to Colorado and spend a few days in Denver, but most excitedly in Leadville for a week with the Colorado Outward Bound School. The area was breath taking—willows, aspens, spruce... I saw my first Great-grey Owl one evening as it flew ever so silently over the fishery ponds. Gray-jays are quite curious and often incredible pests when you don't particularly want to share your already skimpy lunch. As part of the program we practiced group trust exercises and rock climbed a cliff blind-folded. I dreaded the two-story ropes course for fear of heights, but the pair of Broad-tailed Hummingbirds that buzzed around my head provided a welcomed distraction from not looking down—and I survived. The most fantastic part of the week was climbing Mt. Elbert (14,433 ft) on the first day of summer as snowflakes fell around us. It was a long, cold climb, but worth it if only to see the White-tailed Ptarmigan, Gray-crowned Rosy Finches, and Marmots.

They say that all good things must come to an end, and so it certainly seemed when our plane touched down on the Dallas-Fort Worth runway. We spent three weeks in Dallas visiting various hi-tech businesses and listening to a few too many three hour long lectures. Of course, I suppose we would have slept through fewer of them had we not been out so late at night—but that's another story that I'm sure wouldn't interest any WBC readers.

The fifty of us said our temporary goodbyes as we split up to spend a month on various mentored internships throughout the world. While many of my classmates are undoubtedly sitting in air-conditioned offices, punching IBM keyboards, "Nature Chick" is 10,000 feet up in the mountains of Gothic, Colorado working for Dr. Paul Ehrlick of Stanford. At this moment I am being eaten by more flies than I care to count and observing the wells made by Red-naped Sapsuckers on willow branches. Life is pretty non-existent in this location as the wells are nearly dry. In the other patches I have observed not only sapsuckers, but Orange-crowned Warblers, Rufous and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds, chipmunks, and red squirrels. Although this is only my third day on the project, I have logged in many early morning hours of bird banding. In addition to the birds already noted as being present at the wells, I have caught Mountain Chickadees, Grey-headed Juncos, Yellow Warblers, Wilson's Warblers, Swainson's Thrushes, Hermit Thrushes, White-crowned Sparrows, Lincoln's Sparrow, Warbling Vireo, and Western Flycatcher. Numerous other species are in the area-but I'll wait school starts up again to round off my list.

From here I'll finish the program with a week in Washington, D.C. as the class reunites for presentations and graduation. I'm looking forward to a promising semester at Wm & Mary this fall and plenty of excitement working with the migrating raptors for my research project. See you at the WBC meeting!

Jamie

Received a post card from members Gary Driscole and Adrienne Frank—from Alaska! Some of the birds they mentioned seeing were Horned & Tufted Puffins, Common Murre, Black Legged Kittiwakes (all of these by the thousands), Rhinoceros & Parakeet Auklet, Marbled & Ancient Murrelet, Thickbilled Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Harlequin Duck, Sooty Shearwaters, Ravens, Magpies, Arctic Terns, Pelagic Cormorants. There were other birds mentioned but the Post Office decided the card needed more than one postmark and by the time they quit stamping it—I couldn't read it. Hope to hear more about this trip during our meetings.

A Report from Julie Hotchkiss

Kiptopeke

Kiptopeke is an area we all need to be concerned about as it is such an important stopover for migrating birds. Bill Williams alerted us to the fact that it is going to be developed unless someone comes up with \$5,000,000 to buy it, or some sort of alternative to satisfy the developer.

George Grayson has been sympathetic, and the Department of Conservation and Historic Resources is interested in the protection of several sites on the Eastern Shore. However, it would require a special appropriation from the General Assembly, and it will take strong appeals to Governor Baliles and our representatives in Richmond. It has been suggested that Senator Robb and Senator Warner be urged to get federal assistance for this.

I recently read an article, "Standing Room Only," by Peter Steinhart, that was concerned with migration. He stated that "Little thought was given to setting aside staging areas for migrating birds; most people assumed the travelers could stop at any number of dining spots along the way. Now it's clear that migration is far more complex than previously imagined, and an effort demanding precision timing. . . . Few locations along the migration pathways can provide enough food at the right time to support the needs of migratory shorebirds.

Most studies have been concerned with shorebirds and waterfowl, but our warblers, songbirds, raptors, and other birds also have specific needs in their migratory travels. Many of these special birds are not obvious in migration, or easy to study, but it is important for them to have an adequate food supply to travel on. Imagine a redstart that flies from Massachusetts to

Yucatan. Anyone who sees this flashy little bird is impressed by it, and they need areas to feed in too. Shorebird habitat is fast disappearing, but even less consideration is given to other birds.

Permission to build in important migratory staging areas is often given when the birds are not there. For instance, "One recent August afternoon, a San Francisco Bay developer escorted a television crew to the site of a proposed building sit to 'prove' it contained neither water nor birds." He proved he was right. However, "The following March, conservationists took the crew back to the site and found it under water and teeming with wildlife." It is often difficult to convince people to save habitats that are mainly stopover spots for migrants. Yet it is imperative that we do so or we will lose many of our beautiful songbirds as well as shorebirds.

Perhaps Kiptopeake can be made a State Park. This way it can be used year round, and the state can feel justified in investing such a large amount of money. There are precedents for this such as Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park in Texas and Everglades National Park in Florida. Point Pelee National Park in Canada is one of the most appropriate examples. Spring and fall migration routes pass through this park. The "point" extends into Lake Erie far enough to catch exhausted birds heading north in the spring, and it is a last feeding stop for many heading south in the fall. There can be birds on nearly every bush during migration "dropout" in May. The nearby town of Leamington is proud of "its" park. There are banners and a special weekend for birders.

If Canada can do this why can't we? Kiptopeke has been an important bird banding area. Why can't we make it a state park or National Natural History Site (there are historic sites)? We can protect the habitat and enjoy the birds at the same time. Let's ask questions and make others aware of the need for protecting the critical habitat at Kiptopeke.

Julie Hotchkiss

From THE PIPING PLOVER newsletter of the Chincoteague Natural History Association

Chincoteague Refuge Hook is closed and has been since March 15. The closure involves the beach, dunes and bayside beach. The hook will reopen August 31. The action is to protect the nesting Piping Plovers. This action, similar to last year's closure, has proven itself; who can argue with a hatching success of 26 young compared to 3 young during the previous non-closure year.

There are concessions, however, since one and a half miles of beach north of the crossover area will remain open for public use, including a maximum of 18 off-road vehicles at any time.

A three year Piping Plover study will take place on the refuge. The project is a cooperative study involving both the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The study, a continuance of the management and monitoring program already established, will emphasize habitat utilization during the breeding season.

July 5, 1989 The Daily Press - Lack of eagle births blamed on the weather-Annapolis, Md. (AP)

Only one bald eagle hatched in nine nests in Anne Arundel, Baltimore and Cecil counties this spring, and wildlife officials blame the wet weather for the slow repopulation of the endangered birds.

The Western Shore of the Chesapeake Bay and the upper Eastern Shore suffered the same failure of births of the bird that is a national symbol, and the decline stretched south to Virginia.

"We're suspecting that it was the crazy weather patterns that we had in March and in April,"

said Glenn Therres, supervisor of non-game and urban wildlife with the Forest, Park and Wildlife Service at the Department of Natural Resources.

Wet weather and cooler spring temperatures during the 32- to 35-day incubation period that begins in mid-March probably dropped the eggs below the temperature needed to survive, he said.

With surveys of the 94 active nesting sites conducted by air statewide, Therres said officials just can't be sure about the cause. Fledglings that did hatch this year are about to leave their nests.

Statewide, the numbers dropped to 117 born this year, compared to 135 last year. In 1987, there were 121 newborns.

Bird Watcher's Digest May/June 1989

The latest government statistics show that 37,000,000 Americans spend \$1.1 billion yearly on birdseed. Four years of observations by Al Geis—discovered that birds don't like many of the ingredients in commercial birdseed mixes. One common ingredient, milo, had actually been adapted by agriculture interest to be unappealing to birds. Other ingredients attracted undesirable species while having little appeal for most songbirds.

Peanut hearts, the pointy little piece at the end of the peanut that peanut butter manufacturers try to eliminate, was included in many mixes. Though it smelled good to human beings when they opened the sack, its main appeal was to starlings. Other birdseed mixes contained oat grouts, an ingredient that easily becomes moldy and that attracts every starling for miles around.

The result was that people filled feeders with birdseed mixes, the birds came and ate only the seeds that appealed to them, and then the nearly full feeders were abandoned. Or birds would drop the unattractive seeds to the ground to get at those that they liked. This kind of bird feeding was economically inefficient and, worst of all, didn't attract nearly as many birds as could have been lured with proper birdseed selection. People bought bird feeders and lost interest when the birds rejected this offerings.

Observations show there are some food for which birds have a great preference. Chickadees, for instance, are four times more attracted to black oil-type sunflower seed than to black-striped sunflower seed. White proso millet is the clear choice of groundfeeding birds.

The best bird feeding system is very simple. Geis recommends:

1. For perch-feeding birds such as chickadees, titmice, finches, and a large variety of other birds, use black oil sunflower seeds. Many birds greatly prefer these seeds over any other food. They will attract the greatest variety and most number of visits. Hulled sunflower seed is also highly effective if you don't like the mess of the discarded hulls.

2. For ground-feeding birds like juncos and sparrows, use white proso millet. Placed on the ground or on a platform feeder, this food is vastly preferred over any other small seed.

3. For goldfinches and pine siskins, the ideal food is thistle seed; goldfinches find it delicious, and they have little competition for it from other species, except house finches.

There are also many other factors in attracting birds, having to do with feeder selection and placement, with providing trees and shrubs that offer birds shelter and natural food, and with erecting nesting boxes.

To round out a backyard bird feeding operation that will draw the greatest number and variety of birds, Geis recommends three additional measures: to attract woodpeckers and some other species, erect a suet feeder; in the spring and summer, put up a hummingbird feeder to dispense sugar water; and provide a birdbath so all species can bather and drink year-round.

August 7, 1989 U.S. News & World Report

Where have all the orioles, tanagers, thrushes and warblers gone?

AS TREES FALL IN THE TROPICS, SONGBIRDS FALL SILENT

The spring may not yet be silent, as Rachel Carson warned a quarter of a century ago, but even casual bird-watchers have noticed that it has been much quieter lately. Each fall, some 60 species of our most melodious and colorful birds—warblers, tanagers, orioles and thrushes—fly south to winter in the lush forests extending from Mexico to the Amazon, then return in the spring to reproduce. Now, a new study by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has confirmed that many have suspected: America's population of migratory songbirds is rapidly declining.

Although pesticides and urbanization have cut into the nesting population here, scientists say the drastic drop they've observed can only be explained by the destruction of the tropical forests. Without the resources and protection of the jungle, the flocks starve or become easy prey for hawks, cats, snakes and bird-eating spiders.

The new tropical-forest study by government ornithologist San Droege and other scientists analyzed 2.5 million reports by trained bird spotters participating in the Fish and Wildlife Service's annual North American Breeding Bird Survey. From 1978 to 1987, they found a 45 percent decline in Wilson's warblers, 37 percent losses for yellow-billed cuckoos and 30 percent for the wood thrush. Northern orioles suffered a loss of 23 percent, with 10 percent drops in scarlet tanagers and American redstarts.

A similar fate is facing North America's hard-pressed migratory-duck populations. Loss of wetlands nationwide, and of nesting habitats in the prairie-pothole region of Canada and the Northern Plains states, will result in a southern migration this fall of an estimated 64 million ducks. This will be just 2 million more than in 1985, the lowest year on record, and a stark contrast to the '70s, when fall migrations of 100 million and more birds darkened the flyways.

How far the numbers eventually fall will depend on how successful environmentalists are in halting the rain-forest destruction. Unlike California condors, whooping cranes or peregrine falcons, there is little fear at this time that populations of common songbirds will be pushed to the edge of extinction. For many Americans, deforestation has been an abstract issue underlying the global-warming threat, but the new study now brings the issue home to roost, so to speak, in America's woodlands, fields and back yards. The dwindling numbers of songbirds are yet another warning that the rapid destruction of tropical forests has consequences felt around the world.

Please send information for the next issue of the FLYER to

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