



# THE FLYER

W. J. Sheehan, Editor

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Williamsburg Bird Club

## August Field Trip

Brian Taber will lead a trip to **Hog Island** on **Saturday, August 25th**. We will meet at the **C.W. Information Center Parking Lot (East side)** at **7 a.m.**, and then leave promptly in order to catch the 7:30 ferry to Surry.

We would hope that the fall migration of shore birds will be underway in force by then. If we are lucky, we can see a good number of Sandpiper and plovers—and possibly a few early raptors, such as Harriers and Sharp-shinned Hawks. And who knows what other surprises may be in store.

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## Programs Yet to Come

September 19th Ty and Julie Hotchkiss **"The Wonders of South America"**

October 17th Dr. Jerry Via **"Flights Across the Tropics: Birds of Costa Rica"**

November 21st Scottie & John Austin  
**"Inter-National Expedition to Malaysia, Thailand and Borneo"**

### *President's*

The Bird Seed Sale Committee is in need of volunteers to assist in our annual major fund raising endeavor. No physical effort is required since William & Mary students provide all the needed muscle. If you are interested in getting involved please call Tom Armour—229-2363, or Ruth Beck —566-8234

Corner

## Barn Owls—Sad Ending

In the June Flyer, we brought you up to date on the 3 surviving young Barn Owls in the duck blind in the James River.

When Bill Hynes and Tom Armour next visited the blind in early June, only one bird was alive. There was no evidence of fresh food (mice and other rodents), and it appeared that the survivor had attempted to cannibalize the dead young. Tom contacted Chuck Rosenburg of the State Wildlife staff, and Chuck arranged to come to Williamsburg and take the bird to the Wildlife Rehab Center near Charlottesville. This was done within the next few days, but sadly, the bird was too far gone to survive beyond 24 hours.

Speculation strongly supports the view that the adult bird or birds became casualties and thus terminated the essential food supply of the young.

Well, we did have real Barn Owls in the area for a little while! Maybe next year?

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## Book Review

*Where the Birds Are: A Guide to all 50 States and Canada* by John Oliver Jones. William Morrow and Co., NY. 1990

A copy of this book has recently been donated to the local library by your Club. It is listed under: 592.29 JON, in the New Book Section.

The book is almost encyclopedic in content. It lists birding telephone hotlines across the country, Bird Clubs, Audubon Chapters and Sanctuaries, Nature Conservancy Preserves, National Parks and Wildlife Refuges, and the like. It contains many small maps of birding hotspots—and an extensive bird chart showing individual species data in selected birding spots in each state. Whether you are planning a trip with birds in mind or not, it is a nifty rainy-day book to nestle in with—just to see where the little critters are tucked away—season by season.

## Sightings from Afar

John and Eleanor Hertz report seeing three Golden Eagles on a June motor trip along the Blue Ridge, and into West Virginia. They saw the first one near the North Carolina line, and the other two in West Virginia. John said that one of the latter two was most friendly, swooping down to within about five feet of them on one occasion. They also found some nifty places to stay—where pets are welcome, and there aren't many people! They'll share if you ask—565-1324.

At Craney Island, on July 8, Bill Akers found a Ruff, several Wilson's Phalaropes and a few Avocets in breeding plumage.

On the Eastern Shore on Fisherman's Island, Bill Williams, Jerry Via, Bill Akers and Steve Rottenborn counted 126 baby Brown Pelicans!

Ty & Julie write on 7/9 that they took a boat out to see the famous Columbia Glacier—only 30 water miles from Valdez, Alaska. Enroute, they were treated to sea otters, seals, Kittiwakes, Bonaparte's Gulls and Arctic Terns.

Julie also mentioned that their earlier trip to Inuvik, in Northwest Territories, was a huge success. "We found nests of Wheatears, Long-tailed Jaegers, and Gyrfalcons—just to mention the best!"

On July 24th, Ty & Julie surfaced again via a breathtaking picture of the snow-covered Alaskan Mountains. The card is postmarked Tok, Alaska—which is on the Alaskan Highway, a couple hundred miles east of Anchorage.

Julie says: "we will be leaving Alaska tomorrow (7/25). Have had a wonderful time and have added lots of new birds to our lists—including Red-faced Cormorant, Cassin's Auklet, Ancient Murrelet, etc., and saw an Arctic Warbler today. Loved Denali National Park. Our Ranger was one of Ruth's students. Tell her Mike Duffy sends greetings. Best to all. Ty & Julie."

Black-headed Gull at the British Open.

On July 20, ESPN showed a beautiful close-up of a sparkling gull in the middle of one of the spacious fairways of St. Andrews Golf Course in Scotland. The announcers were not alone in their inability to identify the bird, but Tom Armour (a true son of old Scotland) promptly identified it as a Black-headed Gull.

## Local Sightings

Alice Springe and Barbara Ema watched a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers near home on June 14th.

On June 16, Tom Armour and guests sailed downriver from Kingsmill to the "Mothball Fleet Anchorage" in the James in high hopes of seeing the resident Peregrine Falcons. In this they were successful, seeing two adult birds and two fully fledged young on one of the ships. Tom stated that there were originally 4 young in this family, but two were diverted to other on-going programs devoted to the reestablishment of the Peregrine population. Dr. Byrd is deeply involved in this effort.

A pair of breeding Bald Eagles in eastern James City County has successfully raised three eaglets. The whole family, both adults and the young'uns, was observed by Bill Hynes, and a friend on July 17th. Since the "normal" clutch is two, Dr. Byrd should be at least delighted at this surge in the local Bald Eagle population.

On July 19th, Betty, John, and Bill Williams watched an adult male Sharp-shinned Hawk pick a House Finch from their main feeder. This is especially noteworthy since a summer Sharpie is a rarity hereabouts. But, whatever time of year, a Sharp-shinned Hawk at work is a memorable sight.

Armour and Sheehan drove the Outer Loop on Jamestown Island the morning of August 2, stopping and listening at appropriate intervals. The birds were more numerous, more active and more vocal than we anticipated. Here's a summary:

Great Blue Heron	3	Osprey	4
Royal Tern	1	Mouring Dove	5
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	3	Belted Kingfisher	1
Red Headed Woodpecker	2	Red-bellied Woodpecker	8
Common Flicker	50 or more	Pee-wee	7
Crested Flycatcher	1	Barn Swallow	5
Blue Jay	4	American Crow	3
Fish Crow	7	Carolina Chickadee	15
Tufted Titmouse	5	White-Br. Nuthatch	1
Carolina Wren	10	Marsh Wren	1
Robin	110 (Flocking)	Catbird	1
Mockingbird	3	Brown Thrasher	15
White-eyed Vireo	1	Red-eyed Vireo	7
Yellowthroat	5	Summer Tanager	1
Cardinal	25	Indigo Bunting	4
Towhee	30	Red-winged Blackbird	24
Common Grackle	20	Cowbird	20

On August 4th, in hopes of finding some early migrant shore birds, Tom Armour, Bill Williams and Tom McCary caught the early ferry in the direction of Hog Island. The shore birds simply were not there—with a few minor exceptions—perhaps because the impoundment areas were all full of water, with no juicy mud flats in sight! And perhaps there were other reasons known only to shore birds.

However, our lads did come up about about 55 species. I have picked out a strong sample of what I consider their better finds, to share with you.

Great Egret		Snowy Egret	2
Tri-colored Heron	4	Green-backed Heron	1
Green-winged Teal	2	Osprey	
Bald Eagle	4	Greater Yellowlegs	2
Lesser Yellowlegs	1	Spotted Sandpiper	5
Semipalmated Sandpiper	4	Great Black-backed Gull	
Royal Tern	2	Forster's Tern	10
Least Tern	2	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	1
Belted Kingfisher	1	Kingbird	6
Purple Martin	8	Tree Swallows	10
<b>Bank Swallow</b>	<b>500</b>	Marsh Wren	1
Gnatcatcher	2	White-eyed Vireo	1
<b>Yellow Warbler</b>	<b>2</b>	Blue Grosbeak	3
Indigo Bunting	2	Field Sparrow	1
<b>Bobolink</b>	<b>5</b>	Orchard Oriole	7

Let it be noted that Mr. Williams failed to count House Sparrows on the list furnished me, though he routinely and automatically recorded Rock Doves and Starlings—both non-birds! Some years ago, he even tried to slip in a Flying Squirrel to pad out his count. Never trust a career lister unless you are a C.P.A.!

The Doyles birded at Camp Peary on August 4th with the following fine results: 1 Bald Eagle, 10 Osprey, 20 each Great Egret and Snowy Egret, 1 Tri-colored Heron (formerly known as Louisiana Heron), and 1 Green-backed Heron. Also, they saw a Caspian Tern, who conveniently posed for them, and 8 mature Red-headed Woodpeckers. On August 5th, the Doyles added an immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron, a Yellow-throated Warbler and a Blue Grosbeak. Nice!

Bill Snyder reports watching a Kestrel while playing golf at Cheatham Annex. In past years, Kestrels have successfully raised young Kestrels at Cheatham. Wonder if Bill scored it as a birdie!

### **WBC Annual Scholastic Grants**

The annual Williamsburg Bird Club Scholastic grants were established to provide limited financial assistance to the College of William and Mary graduate or undergraduate students in Avian studies in Virginia.

It is a pleasure to announce the 1990 recipients and their chosen projects as follows:

**Kennedy Clark**      *Shoreline Foraging Habitants Selected by Bald Eagles on the James River in Virginia*

**Gregory Kellor**      *Reproductive Success and Substrate Selection by the Common Tern and Black Skimmer*

**Timothy O'Connell**      *Effects of Gull (Larus) Predation on Reproductive Success of Chesapeake Bay Terns (Sterna)*

All of the above are graduate students, and each has been granted a stipend of \$300.00 by the Club. We wish them every success in their studies, and look forward to their presentations to the club membership on the results of their respective research efforts.

## Craney Island-Portsmouth, Va.

Since Craney Island is one of the sites the Club bird walks regularly explore, the following article by Ruth Beck on the status of some of our "worry-birds" at Craney is of particular interest and currency. Our thanks to you, Mrs. Beck, for sharing!

### **The Use of Craney Island, Portsmouth, Virginia By Threatened and Endangered Avian Species**

Prepared by  
Ruth Beck

College of William and Mary  
Williamsburg, Virginia 23185  
July 27, 1990

Craney Island (N 36° 55', W 76° 22') is a man made, dredge spoil disposal site operated by the Norfolk District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers since the 1950's. This area covers about 51 square kilometers and extends 6.5 kilometers into Hampton Roads from the original shoreline. This site provides areas similar to the overwash areas of the barrier islands of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. In general the site is not affected by tidal action, but nests are at a greater risk of flooding by heavy rain because of the silt content of the substrate. There is a high degree of human activity at this site involving the use of heavy equipment in the movement of dredged material. This activity regularly alters the topology of the area.

Since the completion of the study of the breeding biology of the least tern in Virginia by J. W. Akers in 1975, Craney Island has been monitored for colonial and solitary beach nesting species. For least terns, the population has fluctuated from a low of 100 adults in 1977 to a high of 600 adults in 1989.

In 1978-79 no least terns were successful due to extensive project operations. Each year from 1980 to 1985, about 200 adult least terns returned with varying degrees of success due to flooding and washing from severe storms, and general human activity with heavy equipment. By 1985 it had become evident that a coordinated approach was necessary to develop a more

permanent form of protection.

Since 1985, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and the Department of Biology of the College of William and Mary have entered into management agreements with the purpose of establishing and protecting potential least tern nesting sites as well as those of other beach nesters.

During each winter since 1986, Hank Williamson, the site superintendent of the Craney Island project, identified areas not required for dredging operations for the upcoming spring and summer. A site inspection was conducted by Hank Williamson and Ruth Beck, College of William and Mary's Department of Biology, to assess each area for its potential as a colonial bird breeding site. The most promising areas were designated on the Craney Island Site Plan. The Corps then improved the selected sites as necessary by elevating them for better drainage and by covering them with sand and white shell fragments to attract the least terns. The Corps has also limited vehicular traffic around the boundaries of these areas.

From 1985 to the present, there have been three to six separate sub groups of least terns using this area. In 1985 an experiment was conducted to decoy least terns to selected sites. Fifty wooden least tern decoys were constructed and displayed in each of three potential nesting sites. From 1986 to 1988 the terns continued to use two of the three sites. During this period, all tern colonies were located and posted by bird nesting signs to prevent disturbance by vehicular traffic. In addition, the Corps constructed circumferential trenches and blocked roads passing through terneries, as necessary, to prevent disturbance of the sites.

In 1989, a large area was constructed and about 600 adults attempted nesting. Washing from heavy rains caused the first nesting attempt to fail; however the birds did recycle with moderate success. The first nesting success of the piping plover on Craney Island was also determined in 1989. All three young plovers fledged.

In 1990, about 250 adult least terns in seven sub colonies have been observed. The area has

experienced heavy rains and a considerable number of nests flooded. The largest of these colonies contains about 75 adult birds. The relatively small size of these colonies places them at a disadvantage in defending against various predators. These predators include herring and great black-backed gulls, northern harriers, peregrine falcons, and American kestrels. The tracks of both dogs and red foxes have been found in the colonies during the breeding season.

One pair of Wilson's plovers was observed on eight of twelve occasions from May 1 to July 7, 1990. This pair acted in a territorial manner; however no nest was observed. It is possible this pair attempted to nest but failed.

The brown pelican is now regularly using Craney Island as a resting area. On one occasion this spring, 250 birds were counted along the newly created beach area along the northwest side of the island. Since this species has been observed in increasing numbers for the last three years, it is highly likely that they may attempt nesting in the near future.

Four pairs of piping plovers have been observed on Craney Island since May 1, 1990. Three nests, each with four eggs, were located. Eight young have hatched. Each nest has been posted and a portion on the Craney Island circumferential road has been blocked to prevent any vehicular traffic in the area.

In 1990 all of the tern colonies and piping plover nests were marked on a map and presented to the Craney Island site office. Each area was visited by a representative of that office to clearly identify each site.

Continued cooperation with all involved agencies and monitoring personnel is expected.

We would like to welcome the following new members to the Williamsburg Bird Club:

Mr. & Mrs. C. A. Hart, Sr.  
189 West Queens Drive  
Williamsburg, Va. 23185  
220-2233

Dorothy Whitfield  
175-10 Merrimac Trail  
Williamsburg, Va. 23185  
220-0593

## Help! The Bees and the Hummers

Several of us are more than dismayed at the way bees have taken over our Hummingbird feeders—to the obvious detriment of the Hummers' peace and happiness.

Some of us have yellowjackets (ground bees) and in hot days they tend to appear in such numbers as to give the Hummers no chance to get to the bar. Sometimes, moving the feeder to a new but nearby location seems to disorient the bees for a while—even a move of 20 feet or so. Failing that, an occasional shot of bee/wasp spray will clear the air—but then we worry about contaminating the Hummer food. On occasion, I have been able to locate a few yellowjacket nests (holes in the ground) and deal with them under cover of night. This helps—unless the neighbors have nest sites also!

But beyond the yellowjackets, some of our members are having trouble with Bumblebees and a small, unidentified, wasp-like critter.

Anyway, HELP is indeed welcomed, so if you have a remedy or even a suggestion, or even want to share an experience, will you please call me at 220-2122 or drop a card to 104 Oak Road, Williamsburg, Va. 23185.

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Please send any news or articles for future issues of the FLYER to **104 Oak Road, Williamsburg, Va. 23185**