



# THE FLYER

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July/August 1991

Williamsburg Bird Club

Bill Sheehan, Editor (220-2122)

## August Events

### Field Trip

The August field trip will be on **Saturday, the 24th**; the destination—**Hog Island**. We should expect to see early migrating shorebirds, raptors and warblers.

Emily and Allan Sharrett will be our leaders, and they ask that we meet at **8:00 a.m.** at the Colonial Information Center parking lot (right hand side). We will car-pool as appropriate and catch the 8:30 a.m. ferry.

## Coming Attractions

When club meetings resume on **September 18th**, Bill Williams will lead the fall program series with two fine subjects:

**Hawk Migrations through Kiptopeake and Woodcocks—Close Up and Personal**

In **October**, Dr. Jack Brooks of the College of William & Mary will present a sampler on Birds of Australia and perhaps a few other national treasures from Down Under. Dr. Brooks is a Professor of Biology at the College, and has had extensive experience exploring Australia from the viewpoint of a professional biologist.

In **November**, the travelling Hotchkiss couple, Julie and Ty, will share with us some of their adventures above the Arctic Circle in the Northwest Territories, and in various Alaskan locales.

Next Field Trip August 24

Next Meeting September 18

## President's

Corner

As you all know from the newspapers, our young Peregrine Falcons have apparently been stolen from their home on the James River by BAD guys. We are pledging a \$500 reward for information resulting in the arrest and conviction of the person or persons involved. Also, the Virginia Society of Ornithology is considering asking all chapters to pledge rewards and with over twenty-five chapters, the reward fund could be substantial—in the order of \$10,000. Anyone with information on the missing Peregrines should call Mr. Dan Hurt, Special Agent of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 890-0003.

*Tom Armour*

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## **Colonial Waterbird Society Meeting**

The Colonial Waterbird Society—in which Ruth Beck is a very active member—will hold its annual meeting October 17-20 1991, at Fort Magruder Inn and Conference Center in Williamsburg. During the period of the meeting there will be readings of scientific papers, (10/18 & 19), a banquet (10/19) and field trips (10/20) in which a few of our members will participate.

Ruth extends an invitation to WBC members to attend all or part of the sessions, and we will publish more details in the September FLYER. For your editor, and at his pleading request, Ruth kindly defined 'Colonial Waterbirds' as "those waterbirds which nest in colonies, such as Herons, Egrets, Terns, Gulls and Skimmers."

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## **Annual Bird Seed Sale**

The club's annual sale of bird seed is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, October 26th. Details and order forms will be included in the September FLYER.

## **Early Migrants**

A goodly number of birds will start coming thorough on their way south before the September FLYER reaches you in mid-September. Its not too early to take a look at the Summary of Local Bird Data which came with your March 1991 FLYER. Check the early dates and you'll find quite a number of Thrushes and Warblers on the move. In addition to those which bred to the north (or in the mountains) there are a dozen or so warbler species who do nest (sparingly perhaps) in our area, and who now move locally in the post-breeding and foraging activities. Better check the book for fall plumages, because some of those critters don't look one bit like the ones you saw in the spring. They ain't talkin', either, so you just can't go by their accents. Challenge, Challenge!! But, just do it!

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## **Reports from Away**

Sometime in June, Ty & Julie Hotchkiss visited Machais Seal Island, near the Maine coast. Julie admits to Puffins, Razorbills, Arctic Terns and Murres.

Steve Rottenborn broke his Eastern Shore silence on July 26th with the very exciting report of a White-winged Dove near the Virginia National Wildlife Refuge—immediately north of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel North Toll Plaza. This is a rare one for Virginia, and we understand that the bird was seen by others during the following few days at least.

Armour learned from "sources" that at least one pair of Avocets nested at Craney Island. Tom spent two weeks in the Hatteras area, but didn't report much more than a few Willets. Fishing, scuba-diving and monitoring grandchildren kept him busy.

# BIRDS FROM Around the Area

During the mid-June period, Bob Morris reported 2 young Red-shouldered Hawks practicing their skills at Kingsmill near his home. Bob had previously told of a nest near-by. On June 19, the young Great-crested Flycatchers in Larry Rickett's box (Oak Road) popped out into the world. Second consecutive year for Larry. On June 20th, Brian Taber had a female Black & White Warbler in his yard—Kingswood area. Bill Snyder, on June 25th, watched 3 or 4 Rough-winged Swallows landing on a branch of a Red Oak! On July 1, Tom Armour watched 6 young Wood Ducks (about 2 days old) with the older birds in Kingsmill Pond. Snyder observed a Hairy Woodpecker adjacent to Kingsmill on July 3rd. Cynthia Long told of a Downy Woodpecker which persisted in taking syrup from her Hummingbird feeder at Queen's Lake. Cynthia really didn't mind, except the Downy tended to spill a lot. Cynthia & Bob were headed for a safari in Kenya in early July, and will tell you a bit about that later on. (Long way to go to avoid a Downy!) Many of us are having more hummers around now than a month ago.

As an aside, no one had yet reported a baby cowbird being fed by a foster parent. This

is the first year in 10 or more in which I have not seen a young cowbird incessantly badgering an adult Towhee, or Robin, or Wood Thrush or Red-eyed Vireo for food. On July 23, a Kentucky Warbler was in and around low shrubbery behind my house for a least 2 hours. The Doyles report lots of adult Red-headed Woodpeckers in various locations at Camp Peary (July 27). They also report that a Peary resident has a mystery owl. Grace & Joe will try to check this out. A Barn Owl would be very satisfactory, Joe.

Tom Armour counted 107 Royal Terns at the KM Marina on July 28th. It is simply not true that our president can't get past 20. Dick Mahone grows blueberries, and this year his patch is being vandalized by Thrashers, Catbirds, Mockers, Robins and especially Summer Tanagers!

I ran a very unscientific survey of breeding birds in the approximate two blocks surrounding my home. Here are the results.

Mourning Dove	Wood Thrush
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	American Robin
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Gray Catbird
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Mockingbird
Downy Woodpecker	Brown Thrasher
Common Flicker	Red-eyed Vireo
Eastern Wood Pewee	Pine Warbler
Great-crested Flycatcher	Summer Tanager
Blue Jay	Northern Cardinal
Carolina Chickadee	Rufous-sided Towhee
Tufted Titmouse	Chipping Sparrow
White-breasted Nuthatch	Song Sparrow
Carolina Wren	Common Grackle
House Wren	House Finch
Eastern Bluebird	

That comes to a total of 29, and I'm rather pleased with it.

Please send any news or articles for future issues of the FLYER to  
**Bill Sheehan at**  
**104 Oak Road, Williamsburg, Va.**  
**23185**  
 or call **220-2122**

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## Miscellaneous Items

**Representing the Williamsburg Bird Club** and Chairman Bill Davies, Reverend Sam Hart accepted an award certificate from the James City Clean County Commission on July 27th at a ceremony at Upper County Park. The award was presented for "valued contributions" to the county through our participation in the Adopt-a-Highway program. Our thanks and gratitude to Bill, Sam and the other "litter-pickers" who responded to Bill Davies quarterly calls for helpers in policing Route 5 from Fiver Forks to Route 614. Hopefully, more of us will seek to participate when Bill rings the bell again.

**The Fish and Wildlife Service** has reported that breeding populations of Northern Pintails, once one of the most numerous of North American Ducks, have suffered sharp declines because of drought conditions in Canada and Northern United States. The decline is estimated at 20%—in just a single year. On the bright side, total duck breeding population was up an estimated 6 percent from 1990. Exceptional gains were: Blue-winged Teal (up 34%); Scaup (up 25%) and American Wigeon (up 11%).

**Jamie Doyle**, a former Editor of the FLYER, now associated with the Smithsonian Institution, recently sent president Armour a nifty packet describing the many programs in place which address the problems faced by those migratory birds which breed in North America but spend half their time in tropical America through the marvel of migration. The biologists and ecologists call this group of birds neotropical migrants—but they can't fool us! Anyway, Jamie says these kits are available from the Smithsonian, and perhaps even from the Audubon Society—a co-sponsor. If you're interested try it:

Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560

Title of the kit is: Migratory Bird Information Kit

**Our president** reports a slow, if erratic, movement of Monarchs crossing the James and point south. Tom believes that some of them have Mexican visas.

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# Birds from Afar

A truer description is rarely seen! In early July, Cynthia and Bob Long set out for Kenya, and Cynthia was most thoughtful in sharing with us some of the highlights. Her account is below

*It was the ultimate field trip, an eight day July safari through Kenya with our son, Mike. Starting in Nairobi, which is over a mile high, we travelled in mini vans through a variety of life zones and habitats, from the dry, semi-arid plains of Samburu, to the cool, lush slopes of Mount Kenya, over 10,000 ft.*

*I had every intention of seeing at least 300 birds, which is still not all the species listed in Kenya, but was so distracted by herds of elephants, giraffes, and wildebeests, I only tallied 75 official species. It gives me a great excuse for another trip.*

*Kenya gave me new respect for starlings—one of the most beautiful birds was the Superb Starling, glowing with turquoise and rust. They were in their usual gregarious flocks, and dominated the feeding station at Samburu when they could overwhelm the monkeys.*

*Weaver finches were a fascinating family. Their nests filled the leeward branches of acacia trees, not all of them occupied, as the overworked*

*males built many nests in hopes of luring a mate. The females choose the nest and male they like best. Mike called them "spec nests".*

*We also saw several species of hornbills, who all plaster the female in the nest cavity, where she has to remain until the last fledgling has left. I'd much rather be a female weaver bird than a hornbill.*

*Our most thrilling birding site was at alkaline Lake Nakuru, where we found charcoal and pink masses of greater and lesser flamingos, as well as white pelicans and herons.*

*Ugly bird prize has to go to the Marabou storks—they stood around golf courses and river banks looking like Herman Munster.*

*Secretary birds were dressed in black tights, and moved across the plains looking for scorpions and snakes with a curious, skating walk.*

*Biggest birds, of course, were ostriches, and we saw them in abundance, sharing the plains with giraffes, zebras, many different antelope, and predators—lions, cheetahs, and leopards.*

*The Lilac-breasted Roller was another colorful beauty, and we saw them often. There were lots of kinds of kingfishers, one of the most*

*colorful was called Gray-headed Kingfisher, I never did figure that out. Our guide, a veterinarian, could name every plant and animal in Kenya. He said highly colored birds evolved in areas of high light and heat intensity, like the equator where Kenya sits. This helps them to reflect the heat. Drab colored birds evolve in cold climates, where they need to absorb heat. Kenya did have their share of LBJs too.*

*There were lots of wonderful raptors; fish eagles look much like our Bald Eagle, Martial Eagles, Bateleurs, Hawk Eagle, and Long-crested Eagle.*

*We travelled to the Kenya portion of the Serengeti Plain, known as the Masai Mara. The great migration had just begun, we saw streaming zebra, wildebeest, and antelope as they sought the new green grass. A trip in a hot air balloon on our last day gave us a bird's eye view of this wonderful, rich country, a grand finale to the realization of a lifetime dream.*

*Cynthia Long*