



# THE FLYER

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June 1993

Williamsburg Bird Club

## Meeting

None until September 15th, when we resume normal routine.

## Field Trips

**June 12th:** (Saturday). Special field trip to Emporia, Va., and environs, in search of the rare Mississippi Kites and Bachman's Warblers. And with a chance of a Red-cockaded Woodpecker enroute. Emily and Allan Sharrett will lead us south of the James to Emporia. From Emporia their son Allan will take us to his local "hotspots", where the rare ones frequently lurk. This trip is a winner, for sure. For more information and instructions, please telephone the Sharretts at 229-6199 before the 12th.

**July 24th:** (Saturday). Regular WBC July trip will be to Craney Island, Portsmouth. Shorebirds should be starting to move through in southward migration. Tom Armour will lead, and asks that you meet him at the CW Information Center Parking Lot at 7:30 a.m. (Insect repellent recommended.)

## FLYER

A single issue of FLYER will be published for July/August, and should be in your hands by mid-August.

## Coming Attractions

No field trip scheduled for August

**September 15th**—Regular Club meeting—to start the fall season. Guest speaker will be former member Brian Patteson. Brian will introduce us to the exciting world of pelagic birds based on his wide and current expertise in deep-sea off-shore birding.

**September 18th**—Waller Mill Pond. Close by— look, listen and walk to observe fall migrants.  
(Amanda Allen—leader)

**October 23rd**—Bay Bridge Tunnel Island, and on to Kiptopeke to catch the fall migration of raptors.  
(Brian Taber—leader)

**November 20th**—Ruth Beck's 26 acres in Barhamsville, which include a large fresh water pond and mixed bottomland hardwood habitat.  
(Ruth, of course)

**December 19th**—Christmas Bird Count



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## **On the Oregon Trail**

Former WBC Prez Thom Blair and wife Rochet are driving the Oregon Trail this summer in their R.V. After furious negotiations, the Blair's have promised us exclusive rights to publish news of selected avian encounters in which they may participate while enroute. Since this is, in fact, the 150th anniversary of people migration along what became known as the Oregon Trail, Thom's reports should have special significance.

His first report was posted May 25th in Lincoln, Nebraska. There were then 1289 miles from home (Stanardsville, Va.) and 235 miles down the Oregon Trail—which originates in Independence, Mo. I quote from Thom:

*Last night, I lured Rochet out of the RV and into the car for an evening drive, in hopes of spying a bird or two. As I explained to her that Upland Sandpipers sat on top of fence posts in Kansas, what should appear but two of the above right where they were supposed to be. Chalk up one for my life list!*

*This morning at dawn (5.25) I was out in the Lone Prairie where the coyote howl and the winds blow free. No howls, but the booming of a Greater Prairie Chicken on the lek.*

## **Save the Bay?**

DAILY PRESS, Tuesday, 1 June, had a news item on page B1 which addressed the desires of US Fish and Wildlife Service "to acquire 2,479 acres of mostly marshland to expand the 3,275 acre Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge in Poquoson." The story, authored by staff reporter Mark Di Vincenzo, goes on to say that the public can't enter the refuge because it is still saturated with "unexploded bombs and other ammunition" from earlier Air Force use as a bombing range—**and because of agreements which apparently continue to allow the Air Force to jettison fuel and NASA to test airplane models.**

Wild Life Refuge? Save the Bay? Where in the world are our public environmental agencies and private ecology organizations which latter flood our mailboxes with solicitations?

## **Bird Noises**

In recent weeks, several members have talked to us or asked us about bird songs. Some years ago—maybe ten—a guest speaker gave us a superb presentation on the subject, and left a brochure with us. I am embarrassed to admit that I cannot with certainty remember that speaker's name. Even so, I shall quote a paragraph from the brochure because it is both pertinent and clear:

### **"Song**

A song is a series of notes of different types given in succession and so related as to form a recognizable pattern in time. Songs are given almost exclusively by males. Songs are more complex in rhythm and pitch than calls. Songs are primarily the result of the action of sex hormones and are generally concerned with the breeding season. Songs may be used for:

1. Attracting and keeping a mate
  2. Proclaim territories
  3. A substitute for physical contact
  4. Individual recognition—songs of adjacent males on territory do not arouse aggression as do songs of foreign males."
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**Local Scene**

On station at his Hawk Lookout on 5/03, Brian Taber waved to a migrating Broad-winged Hawk. Julie Hotchkiss found a Yellow-throated Vireo nest being constructed at Waller Mill Park—directly over the boat ramp, about 20 feet up. (Tom A. and I checked it on 5/12, with negative results. Nest appeared complete, but no vireos heard or in view. Unfortunately, a small colony of Common Grackles was nesting about 30 feet away, and their fly-in route took them directly over the nest). Julie found half a dozen Snowy Egrets at Drummonds on the 4th—but not noted on subsequent days. On 5/05, a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak visited Nancy Ward's feeder—Oak Road, Second year in a row at that location. Same date, Sharretts recorded Orchard Orioles at KM; Armour watched a female Wood Duck paddling along with 7 babies in Kingsmill Pond, and Bill Snyder had Phoebes again nesting on his porch. Bill also reported a Yellow-billed Cuckoo and 2 Green-backed Herons close by on the 6th. On that date, Drummonds Field had both Teal species, both Yellowlegs, four Sandpiper species (Solitary, Spotted, Least and Pectoral); Snipe and Semi-palmated Plovers. Ruth Beck had noted a Harrier there on 5/02, and Kestrels are seen there frequently enough to convince us that they are breeding. Ruth also found a Black-throated Green Warbler and 2 Prothonotaries at the bridge on Hickory Signpost Road.

South of the James, the swamp near Chippokes had Kentucky Warblers, Blackpolls, Common Yellowthroat, Acadian Flycatcher and Ovenbird—and Phoebes are again nesting under the bridge. Hog Island the showed at least ten Osprey; Royal, Caspian, Common and Least Terns; Kingbirds, Cliff Swallows, Yellow Warblers; Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting; Orchard Orioles and two rather late White-throated Sparrows. All this on the 6th. Same

date, Kingswood area had reports of both Tanagers, Yellow-throated Vireo, Parulas, Blackpolls, Orchard Oriole and yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Redstarts. On the 7th, Norma and Grant Olson saw 3 Glossy Ibis foraging in the pasture puddle at Drummonds.

The Sharretts took a "Mother's Day Count" on the 10th—covering Hickory Signpost Road, Jolly Pond and Jamestown Island. Lots of good ones showed up, as this partial list will affirm: Great-crested and Acadian Flycatchers; Wood Pewee; Phoebe, Kingbird; Green-backed Herons; Yellow-throated Vireo; Black and White, Parula, Blackpoll, and Yellow-throated Warblers; Orchard Oriole; Summer Tanager with nesting material; Kingfishers and Gnatcatchers. Happy Mother's Day, Emily!

On 5/11, Bill Williams tracked a single Horned Lark at Drummonds' Field—and Prothonotary Warblers are building in Tom Armours backyard at KM. On 5.12, at Drummonds, early, Tom and I found Bobolinks, Indigo Buntings, Blue Grosbeaks, and a single Grasshopper Sparrow. (The latter was present as late as 5/29, and we hope is breeding again in the area). Julie Hotchkiss posted 1 Great Egret on the 12th. On 5/13, Dick Fout reported an Indigo Bunting on his feeder, a Crested Flycatcher, and 2 fledged Thrashers—all in his yard on Skimino Road, Lind Fout meanwhile found a resident Flying Squirrel in her Bluebird box. Solution: keep the Flying Squirrel and put up another box for the Bluebirds! Great touch, Linda! Canada Geese offspring are popping up all over. On 5/13, in the small grassy plot just west of Mill Creek (on the Parkway) were two pair of Canadas: one had four good-sized young under supervision; the other pair were sponsoring 7 small young. We understand that at least one local golf course has enlisted Game Commission help and/or blessing in "relocating" a family or two. Apparently putting has new hazards.

A number of us have bewailed the apparent and well perceived scarcity of migrating

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warblers, vireos and other migrators. However, on 5/14 on the heels of a south-westerly front, I had in my yard a surge of Black and White, Blackpoll, Parula and Black-throated Blue Warblers—along with Redstarts, Yellowthroats, and 3 or 4 “unidents”. In numbers, these ranged from 4 or 5 to over 20 in some cases—Blackpoll and Redstart, for instance. This continued on 5/15 at a slower pace. Same day, Armour spotted 2 Nighthawks over Kingsmill Marina. On the 16th Suzy Woodall, out Toano way, reported then recent sightings of Ovenbird, Yellowthroats, Orchard Orioles, Catbirds, Thrashers and a Red-tailed Hawk. On the 17th, Bill Snyder had a great view of an adult Bald Eagle perched on the very top of the big cypress which is offshore from Jamestown Island and visible from the causeway leading to Jamestown Island. Also on the 17th, The Chippokes Route 634 swamp was loaded: Green-backed Herons; Red-headed Woodpeckers; Pewees; Gnatcatchers; White-eyed, Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos; Parula, Prairie, Blackpoll, Kentucky Warblers; Ovenbirds; both Tanagers and Orchard Orioles. (I now believe there was a migration, but the big days were later than usual). And at Hog Island, 3 Clapper Rails were applauding each other—supported by a cast of Royal and Least Terns; Yellow Warblers; Tree Swallows; Indigo Buntings; Blue Grosbeaks and Orchard Orioles.

On 5/19, a Yellow-breasted Chat posed for Armour and me atop a small pine along the entrance road to York River State Park—singing all the while. On 5/20, Julie & Ty Hotchkiss watched a Canada Warbler in their yard at First Colony. On 5/22, our former Bluebird Committee Chair Leigh (Jones) Surdukowski came in from her Charlottesville home to visit family and to find a Prothonotary Warbler. She accomplished both, with a pair of Prothonotaries

performing near the bridge on Hickory Signpost Road. A Yellow-throated Vireo, a few Parulas and a Summer Tanager showed up for the occasion. Later, Leigh found Black-throated Greens and Blackpolls at Jolly Pond. On 5/23, it was nothing but baby birds all day. Bluebirds (at least 3) left the box; 5 young Chickadees, 3 young Towhees; 5 Carolina Wrens, and 2 fledged Titmice were in evidence, too. Also recorded 2 Canada Warblers and a very secretive Chat who stayed through the 25th.

Mr. Guy of First Colony told me of a reddish-colored Hummingbird which visited his and a neighbor's feeder about the 24th. Mr. Guy believes that it was most probably a Rufous. The bird was not seen again in the area, though Julie asked a number of First Colony folks to be on the alert. Tom Armour had 4 newly hatched Prothonotaries in a bird box on 5/24—plus a spare egg that was still unhatched at month's end. He also had a Grey-cheeked Thrush on that date. Rich Goll and Cindy Carlson now live near Grandview Beach (Hampton) and recently watched 4 Black-necked Stilts from their property. My baby bird parade continued apace during May's final days. Two each fledged Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers on 5/25, and a single young Hairy on the 27th. A Grasshopper Sparrow, a female Kestrel and several Indigo Buntings and Blue Grosbeaks continue at Drummonds Field as of 5/29. On 5/31, in the Hotchkiss backyard, a Great Blue Heron perched on a dead Cypress stub drew multiple attacks by an Osprey—reasons unknown, at least to Julie. Each departed in a different direction. Travel note: the itinerant Hotchkiss RV departed 6/01 for an extended tour to at least the Tetons.



# It Should Be Noted

## **Bluebirds Nesting at Interstate Rest Area**

February FLYER described member Keith Kennedy's Bluebird Trail project at the Interstate 64 rest stop (westbound side) in New Kent County. Of the 5 boxes Keith installed, he reports that two housed Bluebirds. Real good, and what a great idea! Inspired, perhaps, by an article in a recent Bird Watcher's Digest, Keith hopes to branch out into nesting boxes designed for Kestrel.

## **Birding with the U. S. Navy**

It was only appropriate that our own Tom Armour, a naval aviator and erstwhile combat carrier pilot, would participate as a guest of the Navy in training exercises in the Atlantic off the Virginia Capes. Tom boarded USS Guam (LPH-9) on 5/25 and at dawn on the 26th the ship (a helicopter carrier) was in her operating area about 50 miles east of Norfolk. Winds had been and were 15-20 knots strong and from the west. He was hoping to see some of the ocean birds to add to his list; but none were in sight. Not to despair, for the Patron Saint of bird listers—whose name fortunately escapes me—brought in some samples of small land birds, and even arranged them for Tom in sheltered areas about the deck. This was over a period of two days, and from 50 miles at sea friend Tom has these to report: Nashville, Yellow-throated, Black-throated Blue and magnolia Warblers; Northern Oriole; and Summer Tanager. Oh for the life of a sailor!

## **Red-cockaded Woodpecker** [From VSO Newsletter (Summer Issue), April 1993]

The status of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker in Virginia remains tenuous at best. Only five breeding sites remain where over 30 clans thrived in the 1960's. One Red-cockaded Woodpecker sites that was abandoned in 1990 remains idle with no evidence as to the current disposition of this clan. One new woodpecker clan was discovered this year by Game Department personnel bringing the total back up to 5 active sites. These five sites contained 12 adult birds this spring which produced 6 young, generating a total of 18 Red-cockaded Woodpeckers known to be present in Virginia as of July.

In a cooperative venture between state and federal agencies, 4 of the 5 Red-cockaded Woodpecker sites were treated with herbicides to control the hardwood midstory. This effort was extremely successful and was designed to be a precursor to a controlled burn project scheduled for the next project year in cooperation with the Department of Forestry.

## **Article on Dr. Mitchell Byrd**

The magazine *Modern Maturity* (June-July issue) contains a fine article on Dr. Byrd and his work with Osprey and Peregrine Falcons. Supporting photographs not only display some bird scenes, but also feature Lois Byrd, Amanda Allen, Ellen McLean, Sherwin Beck and the Beck airplane.



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**Spring Hawk Watch, 1993**

By Brian Taber

The spring hawk watch at Archer's Hope pull-off on the Colonial Parkway, across from Hog Island, began well enough on March 31st, with 9 raptors passing in an hour, from 12-1 p.m. There was a Red-tailed Hawk, a Cooper's Hawk, and a Northern Harrier and 6 American Kestrels, There were also Ospreys, Bald Eagles, Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures present, but they were not judged to be migrating. Other birds included a Purple Martin and several Tree Swallows.

Unfortunately, the weather patterns throughout April and early May did not cooperate and offer the ideal, steady, southerly flow of warm air and clouds that normally produces flights of raptors and other migrating birds. Instead, the weather stayed cool, with winds very often from the north or east, off the ocean. The ocean was apparently cold for the season, which altered weather patterns in our area. The raptors must have passed without large concentrations, or used other routes.

For each of the past three Springs, there has been an impressive, steady flow of raptors over this area. There have also been major raptors flights documented over Baltimore in recent years. Baltimore is due north and not very far away, as the raptor flies. Many bird must surely be passing over Williamsburg.

I made 19 trips to the Archer's Hope pull-off from March 31st to May 4th, for a total of 27 hours, helped sometimes by Bill Sheehan, Tom Armour, Bill Williams and Alice Springe. The total number of migrating raptors was 36. The variety of hawks was good, however. There were Red-tailed, Broad-winged, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, Northern Harriers, Ospreys and American Kestrels.

Some highlights include seeing 5 Bald Eagles together on April 11th, watching the arrival of Caspian and Royal Terns, observing

nest-building by three pairs of Ospreys, seeing lots of swallows, Purple Martins and Chimney Swifts, a Glossy Ibis, several Great Egrets up very high, flocks of gulls, crows and cormorants, a few unidentified shorebirds and a total of 19 Common Loons.

Maybe next year will be better!

**WBC Bird Walk—May 22, 1993**

Tom Armour led a king-sized patrol of birders to York River State Park on May 22nd. The people roster reads like this: Shaune and Steve Reams, Dorothy Whitfield, Lee and Dave Schuster, Pat and Mike Healy, Marilyn Zeigler, Marilyn Lewis, Mack Lundy, Carolyn Lowe, Henry DeGraff, Mary Lou Hammersmith and Emily Sharrett. Among the bird highlights were Wild Turkeys, Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle, Bobwhite, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Pileated Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, Gnatcatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Parula Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Black & White Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warblers, both Tanagers, Indigo Bunting and Blue Grosbeak. They totaled out at a respectable 54, or, 3.6 species per observer: Tom says if we give him 100 observers, he **might** hit 360 if the present rate holds! Mind-boggling, at least.

Your friendly editor welcomes any news items, short articles for publication, comments on birds (or editors) etc. Thanks.

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