



# THE FLYER

Volume 18, Number 7

July - August, 1994

Williamsburg Bird Club

## Next Meeting

We're about half way through our annual summer meeting hiatus, and our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, September 21, 1994** at 7:30 PM in Room 117, Millington Hall at William and Mary. More about the meeting and speaker in September's newsletter. In addition, your newsletter editors take a break in August, so you won't hear from us until we crank it back up again in the Fall. Have a good rest of the summer and try to keep cool.

## July Field Trip

The July field trip will be July 16 to Craney Island. Meet at the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center at 7:00 AM. Due to scheduling conflicts, we have had a change in trip leadership, and Ruth Beck will ably lead us around the island. Once at the island, we should see nesting **Least Terns**, and hopefully, **Piping Plovers**. **Please note the earlier starting time** due to the summer's heat and long distance to travel. Also, Ruth reminds us to be sure to bring a hat, sunscreen, comfortable clothing, a long sleeve shirt, old tennis shoes for muddy areas, bug repellent, and maybe a couple of cool drinks. In other words, be prepared for sun and insects.

## Welcome to our Newest Members

A Williamsburg Bird Club welcome to new members:

Gregory and Cheryl Turpin  
15 Bromley Dr.  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Ann F. Jennings  
H.C.R. 1, Box 29-B  
Plainview, VA 23156

Faith Friedrich & Children  
71 Summer East  
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Thede Tobish  
2510 Forakel Dr.  
Anchorage, AK 99517

Ted Tobish  
55 Black Rock Rd.  
Yardley, PA 19067

Lewis Hopps  
100 The Maine  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

## June's Field Trip

On June 18, the club traveled to Greensville County Virginia in search of a few species rarely seen in our area. An unavoidable last-minute change in plans prevented Emily and Allan Sharrett Sr. from participating in the trip. Tom Armour substituted in his usual competent manner, and filled his birdmobile with Joy Archer, Marilyn Zeigler, Carol Lowe and Bill Williams. From Emporia, Allan Sharret Jr. guided the group to the land of the **Mississippi Kites**. Thanks to Bill Williams sharp eyes, three birds were spotted - although at a distance. Other highlights were a few **Grasshopper Sparrows**, a **Wild Turkey**, and a perched **Great Horned Owl**. Over 60 species were observed and/or heard. The club is again indebted to Allan Sharrett Jr.



## Spring/Summer Picnic

Everyone had a wonderful time at our Annual Summer Picnic on June 4 at Ruth Beck's beautiful home. Thirty-six people came to enjoy a little birding, lots of good food (brought by everyone), and fellowship.

The birding produced most of our common summer birds, even though they were quiet and making it difficult to spot. But the food, oh the food ... Everyone did a superb job with their favorite dish.

Thanks to everyone who brought a dish. A special thanks to Ruth and Sherwin for the use of their house and hospitality, especially after Ruth spent the morning and part of the afternoon at Grandview Beach counting Least Tern nests. Another thanks to Emily Sharrett and Jeanne Armour for their help in organizing this grand event.

## Field Notes for June, 1994

Alas, the frenzy of Spring migration is over, and the local summer residents are well into hatching their young and getting them ready for their next big trip south in the fall. Some of us think we live hectic lifestyles....

Since our monthly list is so sparse, I'm going to break from form and group sightings and observations by contributors rather than areas.

Bill Sheehan, Tom Armour and Joy Archer report **Green-backed Herons**, **Red-tail Hawks**, **Yellow-billed Cuckoos**, **Orchard Orioles**, **Scarlet Tanagers**, many **Eastern Wood Pewees**, **White & Red-eyed Vireos**, **Acadian Flycatchers** and **Eastern Kingbirds**, all at Jamestown Island on 6/3. Joy and Bill also have seen or heard a **Yellow-throated Vireo** on Hickory Sign Post Rd on the 3rd, 8th and 11th (they speculate that it may be breeding), and Joy also had one at

Jamestown Island on the 10th. Earlier in the month Joy reported **Northern Parula**, **Yellow-throated** and **Prothonotary Warblers**, all in full song, at Hickory Sign Post Road. Joy and Bill checked out Waller Mill Park on the 12th and found a **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**, **Yellow-throated Vireo**, **Parula Warbler** and **Summer Tanager**.

Tom observed a male **Canvasback** at Kingsmill Marina daily for about a week in early June, and he had a **Red-shouldered Hawk** near his house as well.

As usual Joe and Grace Doyle have been doing an excellent job of canvassing Camp Peary. They report **Yellow-crowned Night Heron**, young **Osprey** on nest, **Bald Eagle**, **Clapper Rail**, **King Rail**, **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**, **Red-headed Woodpecker**, **Northern Parula**, **Yellow-throated Warbler**, **Pine Warbler**, **Prairie Warbler**, **Ovenbird**, **Blue Grosbeak**, and breeding **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers**, **Kingbirds**, and **Meadowlarks**.

Lee and I have had a few interesting species visit us this summer. A male and female **Summer Tanager** have been regular visitors to suet in our back yard as have been a male and female **Black & White Warbler**. We speculate both of these pairs have bred in our area, but we don't have definitive proof as yet. We watched a **Wood Thrush** build a nest in a tall sapling in our back yard, but we haven't been able to determine whether it was successful in its bid to propagate the species. A single **Ovenbird** is also a regular visitor, as are several **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds**.

On the breeding front, Bill spotted a fledgling **Hairy Woodpecker** being fed by its mom at his place on 6/5. Lee and I had a young **Brown Thrasher** being fed in our back yard, and after our earlier traumatic experience with our **Bluebirds** and the **Black Rat Snake**, we have had another pair (or maybe the same ones) take up residence



in a good 'ol orange Williamsburg bird bottle mounted under the eaves of our house. They are working with their five young now.

### **Adopt-A-Highway**

Bill Davies led his volunteers to a record-setting time of one hour on June 4 when they cleaned up our adopted 2 miles of Route 5. The group picked up 10 bags of trash, plus 70 lbs. of glass (146 bottles), and 15.5 lbs. of aluminum (375 cans), which were taken to be recycled.

Those who helped Bill were Tom Armour, Jim Booth, Sam Hurt, Phyllis Johnson, Marilyn Lewis, Mack Lundy, Tom and Elva Mikula, Bob Morris, Charles Rend, Marilyn Zeigler, and special guest, Betsy Elliott.

Bill thank you for your hard work and organization of this project.

### **Spring Bird Count Results**

**by Bill Holcombe**

In March, eighteen WBC members declared themselves participants in the first annual (hopefully) Spring Bird Count Contest. Twelve of those original eighteen have returned their lists, and virtually all included comments that they had gotten out to do more birding and made a greater effort than they otherwise would have had there not been a contest. Everyone collected some of those unforgettable memories that come from the unexpected bird performing right in front of you, or the sharp, early-morning light hitting some of those brilliant tree-top migrants.

Reporting participants are:

**Tom Armour** with 171 identifications. Tom's datings reflect the heavy migrations in May. He picked up his last 39 species between April 25 and May 20.

It was somewhat ironic that it was **Ruth Beck** who said; "Everyone who enters this contest will be a winner!" Of course she didn't account for the possibility that her final tally might be misplaced in the collection of the contest results. Ruth, with all of your area travels, both with the club and through your normal teaching duties, I know your count had to be way up there, and I apologize for not being able to report an exact number for you.

**Martha Briggs** identified 55 and included some wonderful notes, "3/12, flock of 16 turkeys, Dory, Southampton Cty.. Great Blue Heron six all in light....Whip-Poor-Will, only heard in Southampton Cty.

**Bill Holcombe** with 94 says: "This was the most enjoyable birding for me in Williamsburg. I found a lot of those places that I had only seen referred to in *The Flyer*. Greatest frustration was the unsuccessful search for a Red-headed Woodpecker."

**Cynthia Long** saw 37 of her 85 birds in her backyard on Bowstring Dr. in Queenslake, including a Golden-crowned Kinglet, Fox Sparrow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Barred Owl, Green-backed Heron, Scarlet Tanager, and Yellow Warbler.

**Tess Matteson** also pinpointed the location of her 118 sightings with 19 ducks and shorebirds at Fort Monroe, and some neat warblers, buntings and grosbeaks on Noland Trail in Newport News Park. She added: "I can't believe that I didn't find a Greater Black-backed Gull, Brown Pelican or Kestral!"

**Elva Mikula** with the only report from Group 1 becomes the best report for that group with 26 birds and the note: "this was great. It got me started, and I want to do a lot more next year."

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**Dave Schuster's** 126 birds include that Eurasian Wigeon which he picked out of a flock of American Wigeons back in mid-March for his first sighting of this bird and one of the very few reports here ever. That was the same day that while leading a field trip to Jolly Pond, he arranged for a pair of Bald Eagles to lead us down Route 5!

**Lee Schuster's** 145 birds is probably the high mark for the Group 2 birders. (The only higher count comes from Bill Sheehan who admits that his count starts January 1 and he doesn't know exactly how to cut it back to March 1.) Lee, you take the honors for Group 2. Lee's extra beach time was what got her more birds than Dave.

**Bill Sheehan's** count of 161 got started early in January, and he isn't sure just what the count is from March 1. But when your 161 birds includes Parulas, Black-throated Blues, Black-throated Greens, Prothonotary and all of the vireos except the warbling, does a number really make any difference? Bill stuck close to home in Williamsburg, James City, York and Surrey Counties.

**Bill Williams** wins the Group 3 gold crown, the case of beer, and the bag of bird seed with 226 birds!!! Bill says that it was a lot of fun and he really did some things and got out more than in a normal spring, and he enjoyed the contest.

**Marilyn Zeigler** also gave a detailed local for her 110 sightings which will help in the project to do a census of birds in the area and the location of where they are. Her backyard was quite productive as was a trip to the Blue Ridge for hawks and warblers.

I appreciate everyone's participation in this contest and your great support and comments. Should we pick up the reverse migration with a September, October, November listing?

### **The Club's Latest Book Purchase**

As many of you may or may not know, the WBC occasionally purchases a book and donates it to the Williamsburg Library. This is just one of the ways in which we try to give a little back to the community. Alice Sprunge informs us that the club recently purchased a new book entitled:

#### **Secrets of the Nest: The Family Life of North American Birds**

Written and Illustrated by Joan Dunning.

The book looks at the nests and breeding habits of more than 30 species, and has color and black-and-white illustrations. For more information on the book, see page 126 of the July/August Issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, or drop by the library to check it out first-hand.

### **Bird of the Month**

#### **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus americanus*

Another bird often heard, but rarely seen, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo is a common summer resident. To me, his call epitomizes the sounds of summer as one sits in a quiet area and hears the guttural *ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-kow-kow-kowlp-kowlp-kowlp-kowlp*.

Quiet and shy, this slender bird is generally brown above and white below, with large white spots on the underside of the tail and rufous color on the wings. The bill is slightly curved downward and the lower bill is yellow.

Cuckoos prefer to live in dense tangles of undergrowth, and brushy country roadsides, but seldom in open woods. It flies swiftly and gracefully with its long tail streaming behind.

Cuckoos feed largely on caterpillars and grasshoppers. They appear to prefer the hairy

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and spiny species which are supposedly protected from the attacks of birds. It seems logical that Cuckoos would feed off bugs and caterpillars which feed on leaves in the shade, but they also feed on grasshoppers who love the blazing sun. Thus, Cuckoos give up their cool shade in order to satisfy their taste for these insects which enjoy the hot sunshine. They will also eat beetles, katydids, crickets, army ants, and dragonflies. Raspberries, mulberries, grapes and other fruits are also part of their menu.

Throughout the world, the various species of Cuckoos demonstrate unusual habits or are associated with various myths. In Europe, the females lay their eggs in other bird's nests whose eggs closely match those of her own. Our Cuckoos do not do this. In some countries, Cuckoos were thought to be able to tell the future. In Germany, girls would ask a Cuckoo how many years before they were to be married, or how many children they would have. The number of calls the Cuckoo returned would answer their question. There are still many other superstitions associated with the Cuckoo. Here in the United States, Cuckoos have been considered weather-wise. Hence some of its common names - rain crow, rain dove, and storm crow.

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo nests from Canada south throughout most of the United States to Florida. It spends the winter in South America to Central Argentina.

Cuckoos are interesting to listen to in the summer months. Trying to spot the bird in the thick leaves adds to the enjoyment and appreciation of this species.

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