



THE FLYER

Volume 18, Number 8

September, 1994

Williamsburg Bird Club

Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, September 21, 1994** at 7:30 PM in Room 117, Millington Hall at William and Mary.

September Field Trip

This month's field trip will be held on Saturday September 24 and will be the last of our introductory excursions to areas canvassed during the annual Christmas and Spring Bird Counts. Dave and Lee Schuster will lead the trip covering the area known as Middle Plantation. The club will meet in the Jamestown Settlement parking lot at 8:00 am and will caravan to the Governor's Land, where we have been granted permission to walk their nature trail and visit their island. We will then travel to Waller Mill Park, birding enroute when we are able, and take a short tour of the park's trail. Fall migration should be in nearly full swing, and a wide variety of species should be observed. The roadside areas between our various stops are especially good for raptors, and we have an excellent chance of spotting **American Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks**, and possibly **Osprey** and **Bald Eagles**. At our stops, we have a good chance of seeing migrating warblers and other songbirds. Kick off the fall season by joining us on what should be a fairly productive morning of birding.

President's Corner

How quickly the seasons pass! The three months have flown by, and so has summer. The nesting season for birds was in full swing.

My summer included a trip to Missoula Montana to attend the joint meeting of the American

Ornithologist's Union (AOU) the Wilson's Ornithological Society (WOS), and the Cooper's Ornithological Society (COS). The birding was great, the scenery spectacular and it didn't get dark until 10:30 p.m. The highlight of the trip for me was 10 **Short-eared Owls** - two adults and eight young - hunting at dusk over a marsh/field area.

Research activities included working on bird populations in Hampton and Portsmouth. Craney Island, a Dredge Management Facility, had five pairs of **Piping Plovers** nesting, about 175 pairs of **Least Terns**, and six pairs of **Black-necked Stilts**. Grandview Beach Preserve in Hampton had one of the largest Least Tern colonies (350 pairs) nesting at the north end. The Hampton Roads tunnel island (sound end) was home to about 200 pairs of **Black Skimmers**.

It was a great summer, but its time to get back to a full schedule of Bird Club activities. I look forward to our monthly meetings. We again are in search of host volunteers for refreshments at the conclusion of each meeting. A sign-up sheet will be provided at the meeting for each month.

Also, the Williamsburg Bird Club, along with the VSO (Virginia Society of Ornithologists) will be hosting the joint meeting of the VSO and the Wilson Ornithological Society May 4 - 7, 1995. Please give serious thought to contributing your time to assist with preparation of this meeting.

I look forward to another good year of great birding.

Ruth Beck



Welcome to our Newest Members

A Williamsburg Bird Club welcome to new members:

Dr. & Mrs. James W. Lee
170 Wareham's Point
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Martha M. Houle
237 Misty Point Lane
Newport News, VA 23603

Katherine Chasse'
5305 Sloane Square
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Field Notes for July - August, 1994

Shortly before your editors went on vacation in July, the summer doldrums broke, and a number of shorebirds have been observed migrating through the area. I recently spotted the first **American Kestrel** I have seen in quite awhile at Langley AFB, and Lee and I have seen quite a few birds-of-prey flying along the highway lately; signaling that the fall raptor migration has begun. Bill Sheehan was kind enough to compile a composite list of species reported to him in July and August, and that's what we're listing in this issue, minus most of the dates and names of the specific contributors. If you haven't gotten out yet, its time to do so. Let Bill or us know what you're observing as the fall migration season progresses, and we'll see that your sightings are appropriately recognized and credited.

Unusual Species

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher - 7/21 - Hog Island by Tom Armour

American Avocet - 7/24 - Hog Island by Brian Taber

Rufous-necked Stilt, Avocets, Whimbrel, Gull-billed Terns, Wilson's Phalarope, Black

tern - 7/23 - Craney Island by Brian Taber and Bill Williams.

Cedar Waxwing - 8/11 - Jamestown Island by Joy Archer and Bill Sheehan, also at Bill's house on 8/15.

Cowbirds - 8/17 - 300 in a Sorghum field in Surry County by Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan.

Black Tern - 8/17 & 24 - Jamestown Ferry by Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan, and 8/21 at Hog Island by Bill Williams.

Cooper's Hawk - 8/21 - Hog Island by Bill Williams

Common Nighthawk - 8/24 - James City County Mid-county Park by Bill Williams.

Jamestown Island and Colonial Parkway

Double Crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Green Heron, Canada Goose, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Clapper Rail, Laughing Gull, Greater Black-backed Gull, Royal Tern, Forster's Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Marsh Wren, Wood Thrush, Brown Thrasher, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Rufous-sided Towhee, Orchard Oriole, American Goldfinch.

Hickory Signpost Road (Joy Archer)

Green Heron, Red-shouldered Hawk, Barred Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood Pewee, Eastern phoebe, Acadian Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, White-eyed



Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, American Redstart, Prothonotary Warbler, Summer Tanager.

Hog Island (Tom Armour/Joy Archer/Bill Sheehan)

Double-crested Cormorant, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Semi-palmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Great Black-backed Gull, Caspian Tern, Royal Tern, Common Tern, Forster's Tern, Least Tern, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Kingbird, Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Bobolink, Orchard Oriole, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting.

Camp Peary (Joe and Grace Doyle)

Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tri-colored Heron, Green Heron, Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Wild turkey, Northern Bobwhite, Clapper Rail, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Laughing Gull, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Woodpeewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Eastern Bluebird, Wood Thrush,

American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Pine Warbler, Prairie Warbler, American Redstart, Prothonotary Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Northern Cardinal, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Rufous-sided Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow

Birding in the Colorado Rockies

by Cynthia Long

We shared a vacation high in the Colorado Rockies with our children in July, and especially enjoyed the bird watching and botanizing. Exploring the country from our base at 9,000 feet in Winter Park to the top of Trailridge Road at 12,500 feet was a physically and mentally challenging vacation. One of the best experiences was a Sunday morning bird walk with volunteer naturalist Sandy. Species included **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** (distinguished from our **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** by its metallic wing whistling), and **Rufous Hummingbird**. We saw **Red-naped Sapsuckers** feeding young in a hollow tree, and admired the western version of our yellow-shafted **Northern Flicker**, with a red shaft. **Olive-sided** and **Cordilleran Flycatchers** were active. Lots of swallows nested around our condo, including **Tree Swallows**, **Violet-green Swallows**, **Cliff Swallows** and **Barn Swallows**. **Gray Jays** and **Magpies** were easy to spot and hear. **Mountain Chickadee** expanded this genus for me. **Mountain Bluebirds** hung in a state of suspended animation over the meadow filled with Indian paintbrush, lupine, fireweed,



penstemons, red elephants, and Mariposa lily. At the highest elevation, we sighted an **American Pipit** fluttering over our heads as we admired tenacious tufts of moss campion and rosecrown sedum. I thought Bob was going to plunge into the foaming brine when we spotted an **American Dipper** in the exact place Sandy had sent us. We also identified a **Townsend's Solitaire** nearby. **Wilson's Warbler** was new along with **Lincoln's Sparrow**.

The most precious species, however, was two adolescent boys, on vacation, who joined us to identify birds. One boy, carrying his own spotting scope, had risen well before dawn and traveled to the top where he had spotted **Ptarmigan**. They were both so enthusiastic, and already so expert at finding and identifying birds, that we were all inspired. It made me think about our Williamsburg Bird Club. Are we doing all we can to encourage and protect this endangered species? I would like to suggest that we sponsor a student at the Junior High level, and give a yearly scholarship to a nature or birding camp. It could have an important and long-lasting effect on our corner of the natural world.

Editor's Note: Thanks for the great article Cynthia, and especially for your views on how we might direct our service to the community by supporting adolescent education. In 1992, the club sponsored a James City County middle school student and paid their fees to attend a week-long Blue Ridge Mountain Field School conducted by the Virginia Living Museum. To the best of our knowledge, the club has been unable to do this the past two summers due to financial constraints. However, with the continued success of our education fund-raising efforts such as that through Wild Birds Unlimited (see the following article), hopefully we will be

able to again do our part to support our young future naturalists.

Wild Birds Unlimited Makes First Quarterly Donation to WBC Research Grant Fund

As most of you know, in April of this year, Wild Birds Unlimited's Williamsburg store announced a program to donate 5% of sales to Williamsburg Bird Club members back to the club to support our research grant fund. We are very happy to report that as a result of this program, Wild Birds Unlimited has presented the club with a donation of \$94.93 for the months of April - July. We are extremely grateful to George and Valerie Copping of Wild Birds Unlimited for conceiving of and following through with this plan. Each year the WBC supports at least one William and Mary student through a research grant. Candidates submit research proposals to the club, and these proposals are evaluated by a Research Grant Selection Committee made up of WBC members. Typically we select one student to receive a research grant of approximately \$500. In this context, the significance of this first-quarter donation is readily apparent.

Even with the initial success of this program, the Coppings speculate that a number of WBC members have made purchases at the store without using their cards. The staff at Wild Birds Unlimited staff know many of the club members who frequent the store, and usually remind them of the program and file away their receipts. However, they do not know everyone, and unless we take the initiative and present our cards when we make our purchases, the club misses out on a great opportunity to help serve the community. The way the program works, is as follows: Whenever you make a purchase at the Williamsburg store, present your WBC



identification card to the store staff, and they will file it away. At the end of each quarter, all receipts in the file will be totaled, and Wild Birds Unlimited will donate 5% of the total back to the club. If you leave the store with your receipt, you are missing out on a chance to help the club, so use your card whenever you visit the store. (A nice side benefit is that if you should have to return a purchase for one reason or another, you don't have to worry about saving the receipt since its on file in the store!) Every club member should have received a card with previous copies of the *Flyer*. If you have not received a card, or have misplaced your card, contact our Treasurer, Charles Rend; he has plenty of extras.

Once again many thanks to Wild Birds Unlimited and the WBC members who have participated in this program to date, and keep up the good work!!!

A Birder's Test

The measure of a real birder is his/her repertoire of bird puns. Try these on for size!

- 1) What bird has 144 beaks?
- 2) What do you call William when he is angry?
- 3) What did Will's father do when Will misbehaved?
- 4) What bird is a good baseball player?
- 5) What does a candle do when the window is open?
- 6) What blackbird stayed wet too long?
- 7) What bird is a church dignitary?
- 8) What bird never goes straight?

Eastern Shore Birding Festival

The 2nd annual Eastern Shore Birding Festival will be held October 8 - 9 at the Sunset Beach Inn located at the Southern tip of Virginia's Eastern Shore. This is an annual celebration during the Fall migration of the Neo-tropical songbirds and raptors. This is a weekend filled with educational trips and activities for people of all ages.

Exhibitors will cover birding equipment with some items for sale along with native plant species. Artists will show their work - decoys, paintings, drawings, etc. Workshops will cover such topics as photography, bird identification, raptors and butterfly walks. Field trips will visit the bird banding station, Fisherman's Island, Bay Bridge Tunnel islands, Chincoteague and more.

If your weekend, or just one day of it, is free, try to make the trip for some fun and at the same time you may learn something new. For pre-registration call Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce at (804)787-2758 before September 30. There is a fee of \$5.00 to attend the festival.

Special Meeting:

Greenways: Connecting People and Places

The **Historic Rivers and Land Conservancy** is sponsoring this special program to build public awareness and support of the "Historic Rivers Greenway" initiative for James City County, York County and Williamsburg. The meeting will be held **Sunday, October 23, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. at the James City/Williamsburg Recreation Center on Longhill Road**. The featured speaker will be Edward McMahan, Director of the American Greenways Program of the Conservation Fund. Mr. McMahan will emphasize the many benefits that greenways are bringing to communities. Through a slide



presentation, he will show how greenways are helping to protect the diminishing green spaces we have. For further information contact Carolyn Lowe at 565-3167.

Bird of the Month

Red-Headed Woodpecker

(Melanerpes erythrocephalus)

This conspicuous bird is one of the handsomest members of the woodpecker family. He is the only one really entitled to the name of Red-headed Woodpecker. In Greek, it's scientific name means "red-headed black creeper."

As this bird's name indicates, the entire head has a red hood. The breast, belly and rump are white while the back and most of the wings are black except for a large white patch on the secondaries. Unlike most North American woodpeckers, the male and female look alike.

Immature red-heads have a dull brown head and neck. They also have large white wing patches. The breasts are slightly streaked with gray. It is usually not until spring when they develop the red feathers, although it can happen sooner.

Locally, the Red-headed Woodpecker is commonly seen making rounds on Jamestown Island. Country-wide this woodpecker breeds from southeastern Canada to central New York, and southern New England. It is found south through the western Great Plains to northeastern New Mexico, Texas, Gulf Coast, and Florida.

Its feeding habits are varied as are its food sources. Unlike their other counterparts, the Red-headed Woodpecker rarely drills for food. Even so, it still has the hard skull, shock-absorbing muscles and long tongue. They will often dart out into the air to catch flying insects while perched on a wooden post, the top and sides of

tall trees or utility poles. They will forage the ground and shrubs for insects along with searching dead wood for grubs. These woodpeckers will also take the young or eggs of other birds.

Red-headed Woodpeckers will drill a cavity 8 - 24 inches deep usually in dead tops or stumps of oak, ash, maple, etc. The cavity is usually lined with wood chips and four or five eggs are laid and incubated for about thirteen days. Both adults incubate with males taking the night shift.

Red-headed Woodpeckers don't always have easy lives. The invention of automobiles and the introduction of the European Starling have caused some problems. Red-heads are often struck by cars as they fly down catching insects. Competition with the starlings for nesting cavities also presents problems. Habitat loss is another cause for decline. Areas managed for timber are typically cleared before many dead snags are formed.