



# THE FLYER

Volume 19, Number 8

October, 1995

Williamsburg Bird Club

## Next Meeting

Our next meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, October 18, 1995** at 7:30 PM in Room 117, Millington Hall at William and Mary. If you attended our September meeting, you know that there was a mix-up with our scheduled program, and we had to do a little last-minute scrambling to entertain the masses. We're glad to announce that we've resolved our communication error, and Gary Costanzo of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has agreed to do our October program for us. To refresh your memories, Mr. Costanzo is a Waterfowl Research Biologist, and he will be talking about the migrating cycle of Williamsburg area waterfowl. We had a good turnout for the last meeting, and we hope everyone can make it back out to see this month's program.

## October Field Trip

It's time for us to take our annual autumn trip to the Eastern Shore and Kiptopeke State Park to observe the bird banding activities there, and check out the hawk migration. Those of us that have been to the hawk-watching station this year know that it has already been a banner season for hawk and falcon migration. The heck with the legendary 3,000 raptor days we have all heard about in the past; how about an 8,700+ day!! That's exactly what was observed on September 29th. This trip promises to include **Sharp-shinned** and **Cooper's Hawks**, **Kestrels**, **Osprey**, and the occasional **Merlin**, **Peregrine Falcon**, and **Bald Eagle**. Buteos have been making their appearances this year too in the form of **Red-tailed**, and **Broad-winged Hawks**, **Harriers**, and even a few **Red-Shouldered Hawks**. The songbird banding has also been

progressing very well and we'll visit this station too. Time and interest permitting, we'll stop at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel islands to see what's stopping on them for a breather. With a little weather luck, this should be a great trip. Meet at the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center lot at 7:15 for a 7:30 a.m. departure, bring a lunch and plan to spend the day. Be prepared for variable, and often windy, weather with a hat, jacket, sunscreen, Chapstick, ... Hope to see you there!

## New Members

A Williamsburg Bird Club welcome to our new Members:

Jane Crone  
12502 Tower Rd.  
Doswell, VA 23047

Andrew & Donna Barker  
7868 Terrapin Cove Rd.  
Gloucester Point, VA 23062

Thomas Ellis & Ann Moore  
118 Winter East  
Williamsburg, VA 23188

## September Field Trip Summary

Ten people survived the cool, misty weather and ventured through Newport News Park. Our day started out slow, but as we began to approach the swamp, the activity began to pick up. A couple of Osprey were still around to show their stuff. It was an excellent woodpecker day as we saw Red-headed, Red-bellied, Downy, Flicker, and Pileated. Golden-crowned Kinglets, Carolina Wrens, and White-breasted Nuthatches made their presence known. Some warblers decided to show up: Parula, Black-throated Blue, Pine,



Black and White, Redstart, and Common Yellowthroat among them. Red-eyed vireos were busy, and some of them may have been Philadelphia Vireos. Another birder identified two Philadelphia's after he left our group.

The day ended with 41 species. Many thanks to Joy Archer and Emily Sharrett for your sharp eyes and ears. Those that enjoyed the day were: Emily Sharrett, Tom McCary, Ron and Bobbie Giese, Carol Talbot, Dorothy Whitfield, Tess Matteson, Charles Rend, Joy Archer, and Lee Schuster. Another thanks to Steve Goodbred who met up with our group and spent some time birding with us.

## Field Notes for September, 1995

Fall migration is now peaking, and its a good time to get out and observe the migrating species. We've had some good input this month, so let's get to it.

On 9/15, Tom Armour had **Northern Parula**, **Black-throated Blue** and **Wilson's Warblers**, and an **American Redstart** at Kingsmill. **King Rails** have been present at College Creek on the Colonial Parkway from the 15th on. You can get them stirred up by clapping or playing an audio tape of their call. **Bald Eagles** have been fairly common sightings all month at Hog Island, Jamestown and along the Colonial Parkway.

On the 23rd, Steve Goodbred had **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, **Philadelphia Vireo**, **Magnolia Warbler**, **Golden-crowned Kinglet**, and **Cedar Waxwings** at Newport News Park. Other warblers around the area include **Black-throated Blue** and **American Redstarts** at Julie Hotchkiss' house on the 28th, and **Black & White Warbler** at Bill Sheehan's on the 9/30 and 10/5

Hog Island has also been quite productive lately. Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour visited the island

on 9/27 and sighted **Northern Harrier**, **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, **American Kestrel**, 2 **Connecticut Warblers**, **Common Yellowthroat**, 3 **Blue Grosbeaks**, **Indigo Bunting**, **White-eyed Vireo**, and **Red-eyed Vireo**.

Julie Hotchkiss had 3 **White Ibis** fly over her house , and on the 27th, Tom Armour saw a **Snow Goose** buzz Kingsmill. He also had a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** and a **Canada Warbler** that day, and **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** on the 28th (lucky devil!). Keith Kennedy also reported Rose-breasted Grosbeaks on his feeder on the 19th and 23rd, and they have also been seen at York River State Park. **Tree Swallows** seem to be everywhere this month.

The last **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** report this year was by Tom Armour on 9/29. He also found a dead **Swainson's Thrush** at his door on 10/7. The Doyles had a **Barred Owl** spend most of the 18th roosting on their deck, and they have enjoyed a noisy pair of **Red-shouldered Hawks** near their house in Kingsmill. Their weekly visits to Camp Peary have produced **Baltimore Oriole**, 4 flocks of **Turkeys**, **Cliff Swallows** and a **Northern Harrier**.

Finally, **Peregrine Falcons** have been spotted in our area. On 9/25 Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan watched one herd about 500 Tree Swallows at College Creek on the Colonial Parkway. Then on the next day, they got good views of one a Drummond's Field. Keep your eyes open for this fairly rare sighting.

Thanks to all that contributed this month!

## Article Correction

In the last issue of our newsletter, there was an article discussing the disease that is affecting House Finches. There was a misprint in that



article dealing with the movement of the disease. Actually the disease is spreading more slowly westward than north and south. The last article reversed that statement. Sorry for the mistake - we promise to try and keep that from happening again.

### **It's Busy at the Hawk-watch Station**

Kiptopeke has been busy this season. Not only with people, but also record numbers of hawks passing over. The several visits we have made to the Eastern Shore this Fall have really been exciting. This past weekend (during the Bird Festival) was very active. Sunday, although the hawks were flying high, was a busy day for the banding nets. Several hawks were banded and shown to the people who visited. Two Red-tailed Hawks, two Cooper's Hawks, and a beautiful Merlin were seen by many onlookers.

The numbers below are dated as of October 8. This has been a record-setting year for many species.

<u>Species</u>	<u>Total Number to Date</u>
Osprey	3906*
Bald Eagle	108
Northern Harrier	822*
Sharp-shinned Hawk	18,317
Cooper's Hawk	1891
Red-shouldered Hawk	6
Broad-winged Hawk	4983*
Red-tailed Hawk	125
American Kestrel	18,842*
Merlin	1609*
Peregrine Falcon	652*
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	51,624*

\* Record Highs

Top Day to Date: September 29, 8,757 hawks flying over!!

### **Christmas Bird Count**

Don't worry, it is still two months away, but our annual Christmas Count will be here sooner than you realize. This year's date is December 17th. Mark your calendar and try to leave that day open (or at least part of it) as we always need all the help we can get. There are eight areas we scan every year for as many species of birds, and just birds in general, that we can find.

The day usually begins about 7:00 a.m. unless you elect to go owling, and our final tally is at 5:00 p.m. in Millington Hall. You don't have to be an expert to participate. Anyone with an interest and curiosity is needed. Participating for the entire day is not necessary either. Some people elect to work only a half day.

If anyone is interested in coordinating the day and completing the final tally, contact Lee Schuster at 565-6148. It is time for someone else to share the wealth.

### **Williamsburg Library Book Purchase Update**

Each year the Williamsburg Bird Club purchases and donates books on birds and birding to the Williamsburg Library. So far this year we have donated a total of five books. Here's the list:

*Bluebirds Forever* - Toops, Connie

*The Spotted Owl* - Alvin, Virginia

*The Book of North American Owls*

*Field Guide Eastern Bird Songs/Audio*

Cassette/Booklet

*Bluebirds and Their Survival* - Davis, Wayne

Thanks to Alice Springe for monitoring this program and providing this report.



## A Little Feedback

An article in a past issue of *The Flyer* entitled "The Birds and Bees" reminded Martha Briggs of an essay she wrote in grade school in 1950. A few months ago she ran across it, and was kind enough to share it with us and the rest of the club.

### Unwanted

Martha Wren Briggs

One Saturday morning in July the peace and quiet of the wooded lot next door was disturbed by the chirp of angry birds. I heard my mother talking to my father, and when I came downstairs, they had put a wobbly-neck baby robin, which had fallen from his nest, in a bushel basket on a big boulder near the nest.

The parents of the baby bird would not feed him and refused to claim him; and so we fell heir to the unwanted robin.

His meals presented a slight problem, since his main purpose at this time in his life was to eat; however, angle worms were plentiful and could be had for the digging. It was a rather comical sight to watch my mother feed the small robin. Because she did not like to touch the wiggling worm, she would hold the worm in a piece of paper while trying to act the part of the mother robin in feeding her baby. Finally after much wavering on both the part of the worm and the robin, the worm slid to its destination. During his stay with us the baby robin ate pieces of hard-boiled eggs, tomatoes, cherries, watermelon, chicken, steak, and canned dog food. His actions after eating a satisfying meal were much like those of a human baby. He would fall asleep to be wakened when hunger struck.

As the days passed, and the robin developed, he became interested in using his wings. His first

flight was a short one from the edge of his basket to the top of my head. From then on, he began to grow rapidly, taking longer flights, eventually out into the big, wide world. He would return at the most unexpected times, swooping down on whosoever's head or shoulder suited his purpose. His visits for food and shelter became fewer as he grew older and more independent; and then one day "he shook his little tail and far away flew," for now we were un-needed and unwanted.

## Bird of the Month

### Merlin

(*Falco columbarius*)

It sat perched upon an old snag within easy scope view of the hawk platform at Kiptopeke. The Merlin sat there off and on for at least an hour as we watched many more fly over the platform. It was a great Merlin day with approximately 80 flying over us during this cool, cloudy September Saturday. I sat in awe as I occasionally put the scope on the Merlin and simply observed it on its pedestal. The Merlin is one bird that deserves to sit on a pedestal.

A Merlin was caught in the banding nets. An eye-to-eye view of this falcon left an even greater impression of the bird. For me, falcons are a fascinating family of birds. Their incredible speed, powerful flight and hunting abilities are characteristics that can make one wonder struck. Peregrine Falcons are always interesting and fun to watch, but it wasn't until our recent visit to Kiptopeke that I began to take notice of the Merlin.

In appearance, Merlins are slightly larger, more stocky and darker than Kestrels. Adult males are a slate blue-gray above, and finely streaked below. The crown is streaked with black. The tail is dark, and has a whitish terminal band.



Adult females and immatures are dark brown above, with heavy streaking underneath and buff or gray tail bands. In all plumages, the mustache mark is faint and poorly defined.

Looking at a Merlin from the ground, the bird shows wings that are boldly checkered black and white. The wing beats are quick, continuous, powerful short strokes.

The Merlin is a northern breeder. It can be found near boreal forests. They winter from southern breeding ranges to northern South America. It has a tendency to stay near the edges of forests, and nests near open meadows. In the East, Merlins are only found around the coast. They sometimes use the old stick nests of crows, ravens, or magpies.

Merlins are aggressive raptors with little tolerance for other birds of prey. They feed on small to medium sized birds. Being a typical bully, Merlins will make a point to harass a bird that comes close to their territory and air space. For this reason, they are usually solitary.

Merlins are truly magnificent birds, commanding respect. This year at Kiptopeke, there has been plenty of opportunity to observe and become fascinated with Merlins. They have the ability to sneak by you suddenly, so a watchful eye is helpful. Hopefully the club's trip to the Eastern Shore this month will provide some good looks at this special falcon. They are more common early in the migration cycle, but I remember seeing my first near the middle of October. If the opportunity presents itself, a long hard look is deserving for this bird.

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