



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 20, Number 6

June 1996

President's Corner

It is time to relax and enjoy what summer is going to bring us. Many of our members will be traveling to far-away places while others stay close by to enjoy our wishy-washy weather and other things that come with summer. Wherever you go, the most important thing to carry with you is a pair of binoculars, maybe a spotting scope and probably a good supply of bug spray. I wish everyone lots of fun, good birding, good weather and a safe and healthy trip no matter how far you go.

Before summer officially arrives remember the bird club has a few things going on. June 8th is a big day with a FEEDER WASH from 10 AM 2 PM, and then the CLUB PICNIC at Ruth's house at 4:00. Start the summer off right — clean feeders and good food, fellowship and birding. More information follows on both events in this newsletter.

The club officers relax a little during the summer with only one newsletter in August and the next field trip in August. Don't expect a newsletter until early August, just before our club trip to Craney Island. Make note of this trip because it is always a good one and everyone can sharpen his or her skills on shorebird identification. September sees everything synchronized again as we get back to monthly newsletters, meetings and field trips.

Hope everyone enjoys the summer. I have a feeling we will all be wishing for cooler weather before we know it. Keep an eye and ear open to the birds that may be using your backyard for a temporary home and nursery. Happy birding, Lee.

May Field Trip

Our birding was hampered by fog on the morning of May 18 at York River State Park. Many of the birds seen perched above us appeared only as black silhouettes against a grey sky. Nevertheless, we spotted a respectable number of birds (70 species) guided by the keen eyes and ears of Tom Armour and Brian Taber. There were 18 species of warblers. Most of the birds seen are listed among the York River State Park field notes.

Participants: Hugh Beard, Ann Moore, Richard Stanley, Brian Taber, Tom Armour, Marilyn Zeigler, Carol Talbot, Jandy Strickland, Camilla Buchanan, Barbara Moorman-Rockwell, Marilyn Lewis, Gary Driscoll, Adrian Frank, Pat Sgrinia, Joy Archer and Phil Young.

Annual Summer Picnic

The club does not meet formally during the summer months but there will be a June outing, the picnic, on June 8 at Ruth and Sherwin Beck's house. It gets underway at 4 PM with bird walks around the property. Afterwards we will have dinner.

Here is how the food works: Ham and turkey will be provided, as well as beverages. We ask that you please bring a vegetable, salad or dessert to contribute to the meal. You can sign up to bring a dish by calling Jeanne Armour (229-2363) or Emily Sharrett (229-6199) and indicating what sort of food item you would like to bring. Call soon, as the event is this coming weekend!

Remember to bring your binoculars and walking

shoes. Call Ruth at 566-8234 for directions. We look forward to seeing you.

Feeder Cleaning

Please come join in the Bird Feeder cleaning activity hosted by **Wildbirds Unlimited** and scheduled for **Saturday, June 8th**, between 10 and 2 . You and your friends can have your feeders steam-cleaned there for a nominal fee which will subsequently be donated to the bird club. We need volunteers to receive, label and handle the feeders (not the cleaning). Please call Lee Schuster soon to sign up for a time slot if you can help for a while that day. Yes, it's the same day as our spring outing.

New Members

Virginia M. Cordle
320 Archer's Mead
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Richard Stanley
606 Conway Drive, Apt.201
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Sandra Rogers
104 Muirfield
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Spring Bird Count

In the spring bird count, May 5, 1996, a total of 162 species were recorded. That compares to an average of 155 during the past 18 years. Brian Tabor saw one new species, a Black-necked Stilt, on Hog Island. Two species were seen a second time: A Warbling Vireo and a Philadelphia Vireo.

May Field Notes

(Commonly seen year 'round birds omitted.)

Contributors: Joy Archer, Tom Armour, Bill Williams, Bill Snyder, Marilyn Zeigler, Randy & Jandy Strickland, Joy & Grace Doyle, Bill Sheehan, Bill Holcombe and Brian Tabor.

Jamestown Island — This was a goldmine for birders this month. Here's what was seen: Black & Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Wood Peewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Marsh Wren, Grey-cheeked Thrush, White-eyed & Yellow-throated Vireos, Warbling Vireo (rare, 6 previous), Yellow, Prairie, Black & White, Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Louisiana and Hooded Warblers, Blue Grosbeak, and Indigo Bunting.

James River/Col. Parkway — Terns: Caspian, Royal, Common, and Forster's; Double-crested Cormorant, Bonaparte's Gull, Spotted Sandpiper, Acadian Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Rough-winged Swallow, Bald Eagle and Mute Swan, Savannah Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, Boat-tailed Grackle, Indigo Bunting, Bobwhite.

College Landing Park — Double-crested Cormorant, Great Egret, Tricolored Heron, Mute Swan, Clapper Rail, King Rail, Solitary Sandpiper, Snipe, Killdeer, Common Tern, Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

York River State Park — Green-backed Heron, Wild Turkey, Red-headed Woodpecker, Wood Peewee, Swainson's Thrush, Yellow Throated & Philadelphia Vireos, Warblers: Magnolia, Yellow, Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green, Bay-breasted, Black and White, Oven Bird, Worm-eating, Kentucky, Hooded, Louisiana and Dickcissel (rare, 4 previous); Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Yellow-breasted Chat, Northern Oriole, Eastern Kingbird, Scarlet & Summer Tanagers.

York River/Camp Peary — Bonaparte's Gull, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Egret, Green-backed Heron, Black Vulture, Bobwhite, Clapper Rail, Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers, Caspian and Royal Terns, Yellow Cuckoo, Red-headed Woodpecker, Tree Swallow, White-eyed Vireo, Prairie Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Indigo Bunting.

Kingsmill — Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Bob White, Hairy Woodpecker, House Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Warbling Vireo (Rare, 6 previous). Warblers: Yellow, Blackpoll, Black & White, Prothonotary; Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

Hog Island — Double-crested Cormorant, Great

Egret, Bald Eagle, Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs, Caspian, Royal & Least Terns, Solitary Sandpiper, Rough-winged Swallow, Prairie Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting.

Neighborhoods/Miscellaneous — Settlers Mill produced some interesting birds: Merlin, Bay-breasted Warbler and Northern Oriole. A Grasshopper Sparrow turned up in Drummond's Field, and a dead Mourning Warbler (rare, 4 previous) was found by the editor in Port Anne. Bill Sheehan says the last of these were found and banded by Ruth Beck 21 years ago! A Red-shouldered Hawk was spotted in the Coves.

Virginia's Next 25 Birds

by Ned Brinkley

(Reprinted from The January 1995 VSO Newsletter.)

Vagrant birds and patterns of vagrancy in migrating or "irrupting" species can tell us much about the "normal" distribution, expansion and migration of a species. Ornithologists can sometimes draw important scientific conclusions from birder's observations of apparently out-of-range species, but as hobbyists, birders are rarely driven by scientific motivation when searching through tens of thousands of geese or gulls for that unusual bird: we like the rush of adrenaline that occurs in the milliseconds it takes for the brain to process the image taken in by the eye — "It's a _____!" Even if the search for vagrants can be a small part of birding, there is not a single week in the year that does not hold some potential vagrant somewhere in the Commonwealth. Many of these are elusive, retiring or simply very difficult to identify; some prefer very specific and difficult-to-bird habitats. In the interest of encouraging the state's birders to be alert for vagrants, I thought it would be helpful to have an account of "vagrant" species that have been seen in neighboring states. In some cases these are long shots, but others are long overdue. The list is limited to species reported convincingly in the east and midwest, and we attempt to give a sense of when some species might occur and in what habitat. The species underlined are those I believe will be

the next twenty-five species to be recorded in Virginia.

There is a formidable list of pelagic species that have been seen off the Outer Banks of North Carolina, usually in the Gulf Stream, that have not and probably will not soon, be recorded in Virginia. With a strong hurricane, however, all bets are off, and the following species could occur anywhere along the hurricane's path: Cape Verde ("Soft-plumaged") Petrel, Bermuda Petrel, Herald Petrel, Bulwer's Petrel, Masked Booby, and Red-billed Tropicbird. If one is fortunate enough to have access to a research vessel that explores the Gulf Stream edges 100-200 miles off the Virginia capes, these species should be looked for diligently. A September 1991 pelagic trip off Rudee Inlet saw a dark gadfly petrel that was probably a Herald Petrel (15+ records in NC). Note that South Carolina has a record of Red-footed Booby as well, and there exists many unconfirmed records of Black-browed Albatross from Newfoundland to North Carolina, usually late summer through late fall.

In the past few years, southern waterbirds have been showing up with increased frequency in the northern parts of the southeast and even in the midwest (Reddish Egret is the clearest example).

Virginia still has no record of Roseate Spoonbill even though the bird that spent the summer in the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland waters (Smith Island area, April-Aug 1979) almost certainly flew through Virginia airspace (records from NC, SC, PA, GA). Neotropic Cormorant has found its way to IL, MI, MO, MN, TN; although it is unlikely, it is a possibility in central and western VA: look for it among Double-cresteds on large lakes in the late summer. Waterfowl present a problem for avifaunal lists, since there are so many aviculturists in the country who regularly misplace their charges — and these escapees are often unbanded and otherwise undetectable as former captives. Thus Virginia has two spring records of Garganey (Back Bay and Chincoteague), a bird widely regarded as a legitimate vagrant by other state records committees., but it is not on the official Virginia list. Likewise with Cinnamon Teal, a bird to be found on state lists in MD, NC, and SC, but not in this state, since they

were found breeding unrestrained in a waterfowl collector's pond in Accomack County. Almost all records for both these teal in the eastern US (including VA) fall into a pattern of Spring occurrences, precisely what one would expect of wild birds. One "stealth" vagrant for which the state does have a record, Mottled Duck, is not on the official state list, since the hunters who shot the Florida-banded bird ate the evidence. The remaining band was not considered sufficient evidence by the records committee to warrant inclusion. Another problematic species is the Black-bellied Whistling Duck, which staged an "invasion" of states to our north and west in 1993, with rumors of a flock in sewage ponds near Roanoke (does anyone have information on

these?). These may be considered legitimate vagrants when in the context of such continent-wide flights; otherwise, solitary, tame individuals are probably best left in a category such as "uncertain origin."

—*Article to be continued*—