



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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September 1996

NEXT MEETING

The first meeting of the new academic year is on Wednesday, September 18, 1996, at 7:30 PM in room 117 Millington Hall, William & Mary campus.

Joyce Fitchett Russell, a naturalist photographer from Kilmarnock, will address us. Ms. Russell specializes in photographing wildflowers, butterflies and birds. Her talk is entitled "Lucky Catches of a Birdwatcher."

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Welcome back everyone! I hope your summer was relaxing and also productive.

A trip out to Hog Island this morning (my first birding venture in a while) gave clues to the changing season despite the warm temperature. Hundreds of Bobolinks were feeding in the fields and there were still plenty of shorebirds to make me frustrated. I was curious to see if anything had gotten lost due to Fran. I didn't notice anything missing but I'm not sure I would have known what it was if I did. Anyway, the birds were flocking and that is a good sign of movement for the cooler months.

This can be a very confusing time of year between the fall warblers and the shore birds. The shore birds are at the end of their movement towards the winter holidays but the warblers are just now beginning. Just be patient as these little guys move through and be sure to observe any special markings, colors, etc. Watch them for as long as possible taking in all the clues provided you and

then use your field guide to aid in identification. Sometimes going to the book too soon prevents you from getting a good look at the bird—and then it's gone. That is advice spoken from experience.

I encourage everyone to get out of the house and check out the birds. Then come to our next meeting and share those discoveries with everyone else. If it is something really hot, call Bill Sheehan, our Chief Record Keeper, so he can help get the word out. You can also call any board member. If we all communicate and share our findings, then everyone can experience the elation of getting a life bird or have a chance to see a not-so-often-seen bird.

Don't forget to visit Kiptopeke's hawk migration and banding stations over the next few months. You can really sharpen your identification skills and have a close-up view of many birds. See you at the monthly meeting. Lee Schuster

SEPTEMBER FIELD TRIP

On Saturday, September 21st, club members will travel to Kiptopeke State Park on the Eastern Shore. This is the site of a bird banding activity. Hawks regularly stop there in their spring and fall migrations so it is a wonderful place to see all kinds of hawks, Kestrels, Falcons and Bald Eagles. Songbirds are banded there too. Last year there was time on the way home to stop at the Bay Bridge Tunnel islands to observe what was landing there.

As usual we will gather in the CW Visitor Center parking lot (to the right of the building as you

enter) at 7:15 AM, and depart at 7:30 sharp. Bring a lunch and be prepared to spend the better part of a day. Weather is variable at Kiptopeke, sometimes quite windy, so bring a light jacket, hat, sunscreen and Chapstick to make sure you are comfortable.

AUGUST FIELD TRIP

The much heralded trip to Craney Island took place on August 24. It was a sunny and clear day resulting in a terrific number of sightings. No one was disappointed in that, least of all the editor who added 20 birds to his lifetime list. About twenty people attended, including Ruth Beck (leader), Lee Schuster, Bill Holcombe, Anne & Phil Young, John McDowell, Charles Rend, Tom Armour, Marilyn Zeigler, Ron & Bobbie Geise, Dorothy Whitfield, Charles Drubel, Ann Moore, and Tom Ellis. (*List not quite complete due to much-lamented absence of the field trip chairperson and official recorder, Joy Archer.*)

Species spotted: Avocet, Wilson's Phalarope, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Sanderling, Least, Semi-palmated and Pectoral Sandpipers, Dunlin, Short and Long-billed Dowitchers, Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs, Willet, Killdeer, Ruddy Turnstone, Semi-palmated and Black-billed Plovers, Black-necked Stilt, Great & Snowy Egrets, Green Heron, Black Skimmer, Forster's, Royal, Black and Caspian Terns, Brown Pelican, Laughing, Ringbill, Herring and Black-backed Gulls, Mallard and Black Ducks.

NEW MEMBER

One newcomer joined us this summer. Welcome!

Madeleine S. Moss
704 Powell Street
Williamsburg, VA 23185

FALL MIGRATION ARRIVALS

Remember that our area is winter home to a group of migrating birds. You can start looking for these returning winter residents now: Kestrel, Common Snipe, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit

Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Savannah Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Purple Finch, Evening Grosbeak and Pine Siskin. Most of these species can be expected in September, except for the last three, where club records show October arrival dates.

Ducks arriving in September are the Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, and the American Widgeon. Mallards, Black Ducks and Ruddy Ducks can be seen all year.

WATERFOWL HUNTING DATES

You may want to keep the following dates generally in mind so you are not shocked on one of your field trips — or, worse yet, get SHOT on a field trip.

General Duck Season: Oct 9-12, Nov 26-30, Dec 9 - Jan 18

Sea Duck Season: Oct 6 - Jan 20

Canada Goose Season: closed East of I-95, West of I-95, Jan 15 - Feb 8

Snow Goose Season: Nov 22-30, Dec 2-7, Dec 9 - March 10

AUGUST FIELD NOTES

There are two outstanding highlights and we'll start with the first occurrence. Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan reported a Shiny Cowbird near Chippokes, one of their favorite birding spots. It is a first for the club records and may be a first for the state. That is being checked. The second highlight came in the aftermath of Françoise when our birding team of Armour, Taber and Williams braved the winds and rain of Thursday to see what had blown into the James River. Brian Tabor reports the James at College Creek and College Creek Pond was filled with birds but you had to brace yourself against the wind to get a look at them. Highlights included Sooty and Black Terns (also seen after Beaulah), and a Bridled Tern (not previously in our records.) In a normal month we would have found the Hog Island sighting of a Whimbrel by Richard Stanley, 8/4, with only seven previous sightings and a Marbled Godwit by Brian Taber, 8/10 and 11, (five previous

sightings) a great way to start a report, but this was not a usual month. Incidentally, there was no sign of the hurricane birds on the James or very much else by Sunday morning.

REPORTS FROM FAVORED BIRDING SPOTS

(Commonly seen year 'round birds are omitted.)

Jamestown Island

Great Egret, Green Heron, Black Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Tree Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Marsh Wren, White-eyed Vireo, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting.

Ferry/Chippokes/Hog Island

White Pelican (still there 8/4), Great Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Green Heron, Mute Swan, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, Semi-palmated Plover, Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Semi-palmated and Least Sandpipers, Shot-billed Dowitcher, Caspian, Royal and Least Terns, Kingfisher, Tree Swallow, Fish Crow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting.

Chippokes — Great Egret, Green Heron, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-headed Woodpecker, White-eyed Vireo, Prairie Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting *and Shiny Cowbird*.

Camp Peary

Snowy Egret, Tricolored Heron, Black Vulture, Screech Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Mute Swan, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Clapper Rail, Semi-palmated Plover, Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs, Eastern Wood Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting. Highest count was 60 species on 8/11.

Kingsmill

Red-shouldered Hawk, Barred Owl, Common Tern, Royal Tern.

Kingswood

Red-shouldered Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Barred Owl, Black & White Warbler, Redstart, Summer Tanager.

Miscellaneous

Joe and Grace Doyle, who report on Camp Peary, also saw a Red-shouldered Hawk attack a Barred Owl in their Kingsmill back yard! Hairy Woodpecker and Wild Turkey reported on Bushneck Road. Bobwhites reported from all over.

Contributors to this report include Joy Archer, Tom Armour, Joe & Grace Doyle, Bill Sheehan, Bill Snyder, Richard Stanley, Brian Tabor and Bill Williams. *If you could have made a contribution, why not call Bill Sheehan (220-2122) for the next report. He needs to know "when, where and what" and you can leave info on the machine.*

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

This is the time of the year when the bird club needs to find new leaders. If you are interested in helping out with the operation of the club or would like to nominate someone whom you think is well qualified or deserving, please buttonhole one of the officers at the next meeting. Alternatively, just call one of the officers whose phone numbers are on the cover of this newsletter. Some of our leaders need a rest, having served in their present posts for three years. None of the jobs is terribly onerous and the incumbent will always help the new person get his or her feet on the ground. The editor, especially, can attest to that.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

by Bill Holcombe

Brown Creeper

Any day now this winter resident will be migrating back to our area from northern United States and Canada where it spent the summer raising families and cleaning the bugs and worms off those northern trees. There are a few who don't go so far and summer over in the Virginia Blue

Ridge and Appalachian Mountains. Club records show this bird arrives about September 17 and clears out by May 6.

This little five-inch long bird with the brown back (sometimes more grayish), long down-curved bill, white eye stripe, stiff, woodpecker-like bracing tail, and clear, creamy underparts is always seen alone in our part of the world, industriously moving from tree to tree and then circling upwards as it pulls edibles from bark crevices with its perfectly adapted bill. Then it flutters to the base of the next tree. On occasion the bird can be strangely oblivious to watchers. I've had one flit up to a nearby tree and start working away where I could have reached out and touched it. The Audubon Encyclopedia even mentions them landing on the leg of a watcher! Brown Creepers are common enough here during their residence period that they will be seen by most anyone who regularly walks through large stands of deciduous trees with rough bark, but they are still rare enough that each sighting is a special delight. They do eat some vegetable matter and can be attracted to feeding stations with chopped peanuts and peanut butter, especially when it is mixed with suet and smeared on the bark of trees. They often come to Bill Sheehan's peanut butter smeared bark.

It comes from a rather exclusive family of only six members world wide and is the only one of them found in North America. It is also present in the British Isles where it is called "the tree creeper." Its closest nearby relatives are the Nuthatches and Titmice. It is found over much of the United States and southern half of Canada. (Note that Peterson's area map does not coincide with the range reported in the Audubon Encyclopedia.)

The nest is a crescent-shaped hammock of moss, twigs and shredded bark frequently built under a loose piece of bark on a dead tree or in an old woodpecker hole. Five or six brown spotted eggs hatch in 14-15 days. The young leave the nest in another two weeks.

Other trivia: Rarely host Cowbird eggs. Ages have been recorded 4-1/2 years in New Hampshire and 6-1/2 in Britain. Also known as California Creeper, Sierra Creeper, Common Creeper and Rocky Mountain Creeper.

This is a really neat little bird and I hope most of

us get to see it while it is here.

References include Audubon Encyclopedia, Terres; A Field Guide to Birds, Peterson; Birds of the South, Green.

BRAIN POWER

Adapted from "Living Bird," published by Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Imagine you're a Black-capped Chickadee and autumn is coming. New birds will join your flock, jostling for a spot in the pecking order, and your home range will expand. At the same time food will be scarce and you'll have to start hoarding. How do you deal with your new flockmates, navigate a larger territory, and remember where you hid your dinner? According to recent studies, you just boost your brain capacity.

One study at Rockefeller University compared free-ranging chickadees to others living in an outdoor aviary stocked with food. Examining the wild birds' brains, they found that in October large numbers of new cells appeared in a region called the hippocampus. (This region seems to play a role in spacial memory for humans.) The caged birds, on the other hand, showed little brain cell growth.

In a related study at Cornell, researchers found that a chickadee's hippocampus is largest in October. It shrinks in the spring and summer—when the living is easy.

Researchers propose that in balancing the temporary need for better brain power with the need to stay light for flight, chickadees have evolved a "renewable brain." New cells get made and used when they're needed; then the brain discards them.

Now humans cannot make new neurons (brain cells.) If scientists can figure out how the birds do it, the discovery may offer hope for people who suffer from neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease.