



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, September 17th in room 106 Millington Hall on the William & Mary campus, beginning at 7:30 PM.

KIPTOPEKE FIELD TRIP SEPTEMBER 20

We will meet in the usual Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center Parking lot (right side as you enter). Come early and be ready to leave promptly at 7:30 AM. We have a long way to go and need time to form car pools. That's to reduce the cost of the Bay Bridge crossing—\$10.00 per car toll each way.

If you are late, just head for Kiptopeke and we'll meet at the platform observatory. Bring some lunch and bug spray. Toilet facilities are available at Island 1 and at Kiptopeke. We will aim to be back at the Visitors Center in the 3 to 3:30 PM time range.

Islands 1 and 4 are now open for birding and we'll probably stop there on the way back. Once we arrive at the hawk watch station at Kiptopeke you will find several choices of activity. You can join the recorders on the platform and pick up on the hawks flying through. If hawks are caught for banding you can get a close look at them. You can also watch the song bird banding operation or you can follow the board walk and do some birding on your own. We will be there long enough for you to do all of these things.

Bill Holcombe, your shepherd, promises to get you there and back but does not promise to identify every sighted bird!

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

As we begin our new season of regular meetings, one of the goals the board has in mind is increased involvement by our members. You have heard me say this over and over but here I go again. There are many things this club could be involved in throughout the community but due to limited member participation we can't move ahead. The same wonderful people volunteer all the time and the club needs to get other members involved, not only for their new ideas but also to give those already helping some assistance. Try to make that as one of your birding goals this year — to help out in at least one club activity. This could be leading trips, bringing goodies to the meetings, helping with the bluebird trails (York River State Park now wants us to take over their boxes), serving on the board, helping with the Christmas and Spring Bird Counts, writing articles for our newsletter about things you have seen or places you have been, and many more activities. Think about it. We would love to see some new faces!

Fall is a busy time for bird watchers. The hawk watch station at Kiptopeke State Park is in full swing and always makes a fun day (that is where the club is heading this month), warblers are passing through along with the shorebirds, ducks will be arriving, our meeting and trips start up again and the weather is usually beautiful so you can't resist being outside. Once I get settled in school again, I hope to go out and work on my fall warblers and try to remember which hawk is which as it zooms past as a speck in the sky.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the September meeting. We can share stories of the interesting trips people took this summer. Don't forget to support Bill Williams, Brian Taber and

Tom Armour as they participate in the Super Bowl of Birding III which supports K.E.S.T.R.E.L. later this month. Sponsors may pledge a certain amount or by species. If you are interested in supporting your fellow members call Brian at 253-1181.
Happy Birding — Lee

BLUEBIRD HOUSES AT YORK RIVER STATE PARK NEED CARE

York River State Park has a number of bluebird houses that need care and monitoring. Several years ago club members had this activity, but over the years the monitoring fell to others and eventually the rangers at the park. The Park is now asking for our help again. Someone from the park will get you started, helping you locate all the houses, but they need our help to do the regular maintenance and monitoring — usually March through the summer. If you are interested, please call Lee at 565-6148.

A WESTERN LEAST TERN DRAMA

by Marilyn Zeigler

Predation of a protected Least Tern colony within the recently shut-down Alameda Naval Air Station on San Francisco Bay was front page news in late July when I visited the area. A 525-acre refuge monitored by Laura Collins, a biologist hired by the Navy, is fenced off, but particularly threatened by feral cats. Cats have been fed by well-meaning locals who continue to try to trap and relocate them, but the result has been to attract ever more abandoned animals as base housing emptied. A community confrontation has developed.

Officially recognized since 1976, the Least Tern colony had grown steadily since 1983, when there were only three nesting pairs. Earlier in July, 244 pairs had been counted.

According to the Alameda Journal, “the disturbance began mid-month when a Peregrine Falcon spotted the small, ground-nesting Least Terns and their fledglings. Scared adults scattered...leaving eggs and fledglings vulnerable. This attracted a Barn Owl, a Kestrel, and at least ten feral cats....’ This is a life and death issue,” said Collins. “When the terns can’t brood their young, the young can develop hypothermia or if they can’t be fed, they

get low on calories.’ Collins released pigeons to distract the Peregrine and the Barn Owl. But when the birds of prey and feral cats continued to focus on the fledgling Least Terns, listed on both the federal and state endangered species lists, Collins called Animal Damage Control trappers.” Eight feral cats plus the Barn Owl and the Kestrel were shot, two cats went to the city animal shelter, and an “expert from Southern California” came to relocate the falcon.

By mid-August the Least Terns had migrated south, but feeding and trapping for adoption of feral cats continues a controversy in Alameda. However, the California Department of Fish and Game stands firmly against any encouragement of feral cats.

For a comparison in Virginia, the annual Eastern Shore survey by Bill Williams, Ruth Beck, Bill Akers and Jerry Via listed Least Terns on nine islands in 1995. Forty percent were found on Cedar Island and the count of 404 birds was an all-time low. Ruth says that Least Terns indeed have many natural predators but — we hope — not cats, nor those humans who made a pile of tern eggs on Grandview Beach this last spring.

AUGUST 23 TRIP TO CRANEY ISLAND

On August 23 Ruth Beck led thirteen intrepid souls around Craney Island for a beautiful morning of good birding. The weather felt more like September than August. A late morning ambush by a cloud of hungry mosquitoes was the only drawback for the day but this undaunted group, already inspired by great birding, forged on to find new sightings.

Forty one species were observed, including such standouts as the Piping Plover, Black-bellied Plover, Whimbrel, Gull-billed Tern and the American Avocet. Ruth patiently explained how to distinguish the different species of “peeps” and attuned our ears to the diagnostic cries of the Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. About twenty Brown-headed Pelicans showed up, as well as a nice flock of Northern Shovelers. Gulls were represented by Laughing, Ring-billed, Herring and Great Black-backed species. The terns included Caspian and Royals.

The lucky birders on this trip included Joy Archer, Tom Armour, Camilla Buchanan, Bob Fritts, Camilla Lee Hill, Tom McCary, Charlotte and Katie Miller, Chuck Rend, Lee Schuster, Jandy Strickland and Marilyn Zeigler.

Craney Island is definitely a great birding spot and you'll find the trip down there very rewarding, especially if you go with Ruth Beck!

SPRING BIRDING SWEEPSTAKES

There is small, hard core support for this activity (named "The Sweepstakes" by Bill Sheehan) and in an effort to broaden the base we are going to change the rules slightly. Participants in the past several years have kept track of all bird sightings from the beginning of March through the end of May and we report the results in the June *Flyer*. This year listing will start January first and continue through the end of June. Participants turning in their cards will include a return address and will receive a mailed report in July. We will reprint that report in the July-August issue of *The Flyer*.

The logic of starting in January is to include some of the special birds that are seen immediately following a snowfall and to provide a greater incentive to look for waterfowl during the winter months. In addition, we want to encourage some trips to the Bay-bridge Tunnel to pick up some of the rarer shore birds and sea birds that show up there occasionally during the winter months. While the winter months don't have the excitement of the spring season there are some very nice rewards for a little more effort.

Incidentally, two cards from the past spring season were received too late to include in the June report. Tom Armour reported 150 sightings and Hugh Beard 104.

FIELD NOTES

The over all picture has not changed much in our regular reporting area (but do read the Craney Island trip report); however, there are some especially interesting reports. At the top of the list is the Whimprel spotted by Julie Hotchkiss as she crossed the causeway to Jamestown Island. There have been only a handful of sightings in our area

during the club's history. Members taking the Craney Island trip also spotted Whimprel. While they are not as rare in that coastal setting, neither have they been frequently reported by club visitors there. All summer long we have all been hearing Yellow-billed Cuckoos doing their thing from the tree tops but sightings have, as usual, been very rare. Then in August there was a bunch of sightings as these birds came down to eat caterpillars at lower levels. Reports came from Camp Peary, Jamestown Island, York River State Park and Graylin Woods. Strange birds have been muscling in on the Humming Bird feeders and John McDowell reports Downey Woodpeckers sipping the nectar at his place. Bill Sheehan had a Titmouse doing the same thing. Tom McCary watched a Song Sparrow feeding a baby Cowbird in his backyard for several days and then saw the Cowbird graduate to his seed feeder!

Redstarts were reported in Williamsburg, Kingswood, Kingsmill and York State Park. Joy Archer found Marsh Wrens on Jamestown Island on several occasions. White-eyed and Red-eyed Vireos were widely reported. Reports of warbler sightings were notable by their scarcity.

While all of our tropical migrant summer residents are disappearing over the next couple of months, all of those confusing fall warbler and shore birds will also be passing through. They offer great opportunities for pleasurable sightings and frustrating identifications.

As some birds disappear our winter residents return. September return-dates are indicated for the following: Tundra Swan, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Canvasback, Coopers Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Savannah Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco and Rusty Blackbird. While technically a year-round bird, the Cedar Waxwing gets awfully scarce in the summer. But they are true winter residents and should soon become more plentiful. And, while September is a bit early for the Purple Finch, a few cold days could speed their official October 6 arrival.

WARNING! HOG ISLAND HUNTING SEASON

If you are planning any Hog Island birding in September you may want to keep these dates in mind. They are the Dove Season and Goose Season hunting dates there. Birders will be restricted to the main road during hunting hours.

Dove Season - September 1,3,6,13 between noon and 6 p.m.

Goose Season - September 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 13, 16, 18, 20 between the hours of 5 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Duck Season - to be announced.

If you want to check out any of this call 1-757-357-5224. Either Tony or Mac will answer or return your call.

HURRAY FOR OUR TEAM!!!

Tom Armour, Brian Taber and Bill Williams will again represent the Williamsburg Bird Club in the KESTREL'S Third Annual Super Bowl of Birding on the weekend of September 20. The team has 24 hours to list as many birds as they can identify on the Eastern Shore in an area extending from the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel to the Maryland line.

The purpose of this expert birding is to raise money to support the activities of KESTREL at Kiptopeke — and that is where YOU come in. Any donation, large or small will be much appreciated. You can contribute a flat amount or offer to contribute so much a bird. (Be careful! They listed 110 last year.) You can make your offer or your contribution at the meeting on September 17 or you can mail it to Brian Taber at 103 Exeter Court, Williamsburg, Va. 23185 anytime before October 1. If you have questions, Brian's number is 253-1181.

K.E.S.T.R.E.L. is a non-profit group that supports the bird observatory at Kiptopeke and the research and educational material that are produced there relating to bird migration on the Eastern Shore. The KESTREL group can do an awful lot with a very little money so please dig deep and support our hard working team that has also done so much to support the Williamsburg Bird Club.

NEW MEMBERS

Four new people joined us during the summer months: Welcome to:

E. Nadine Martin
P.O. Box 12046
Newport News, VA

Jody Peshek and Paul Nasca
907 Lafayette St.
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Dan Cristal
2820 Linden Lane
Williamsburg, VA 23185

The following is excerpted from the bulletin of the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, August 1997 Edition, forwarded to us by Carolyn Lowe.

Taking a bird's eye view

Protecting birds and their habitat is a landscape-level challenge

By Susan Andrew

Amateur birders and professionals alike have expressed concern in recent decades about declining bird populations in the Eastern United States. The Breeding Bird Survey, an annual roadside bird count conducted by volunteers, indicates that 75 percent of forest neotropical migratory birds have declined in the East during the period 1978-1997. In actual numbers of birds the decline is about 50 percent over a similar 20-year period, according to a Clemson University study. Loss of habitat — in the United States where the birds, where the birds spend the summer, and in the tropics where they winter — is considered the major culprit.

Many of the biggest declines have been among forest interior bird species, those hard-to-see gems of our southern Appalachian native forests. As just one example, Cerulian Warblers have declined to about 30 percent of their numbers in 1966 when the survey began. If the trend continues, the cerulian would disappear within the next three decades. It is especially troubling that

forest interior species are among those in steepest decline, when the southern Appalachian forests host the largest remaining tracts of native forest in the East.

Understanding what's going on with our forest birds — and perhaps how to halt their decline — requires looking beyond individual forest patches to the “big picture,” the level of ecosystems and landscapes.

There is widespread agreement among scientists that area-sensitive and interior forest species need large forest tracts to survive. The Veery is a good example of an area-sensitive species. One recent study of this robin-sized bird with a spotted breast and flute-like song indicates that it does not occur in forest patches less than 100 hectares, and it achieves its highest densities in forests that are bigger than 3000 hectares.

In many studies, rare species and forest interior species — especially those associated with the forest understory — are the most harmed by forest fragmentation and habitat destruction. Many of these species are absent or much less abundant in small forest patches. The degree of isolation of a forest patch is also considered a key factor. The bottom line: Only in the largest remaining blocks of native forest will the species most vulnerable to fragmentation be conserved.

Senior scientists and bird advocates like John Terborgh have argued convincingly that there is little hope of reversing bird declines using small parks and isolated woodlots that are found in so many places nowadays. They recommend consolidating our largest tracts of forest, especially in forests that host the greatest diversity of native tree species, and reducing clearcutting and forest conversion.