



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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## NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will be on Wednesday evening, April 18th at 7:30 PM. Hugh Beard, our program chairman, has arranged for us to view a very timely documentary video named "Watching Warblers." The film was produced by Blue Earth Films, owned by Michael Male and Judy Fieth. These two are renowned natural history photographers who live on the Virginia Eastern Shore. In the film warblers are shown during an entire south to north migration. They are depicted in breeding plumages and even while singing. Come see a really outstanding video.

## AN EASTER TALE

Editor, Last Word

You can thank members of the Williamsburg Bird Club for picking up the trash on Route 5 between Five forks Corner and west to Centerville Road, a stretch of two miles. This is the seventh year that a 25-member squad of members has worked three or four times a year to keep the highway clean. Over 500 volunteer person/hours have contributed to picking up 159 bags of trash. This resulted in recycling of over 1½ tons of glass and plastic bottles and 386 pounds of aluminum cans.

Cordially, Bill Davies  
Chair, WBC Highway Pick-up  
Committee

Someone submitted the following to the Gazette's "Last Word" section on April 2: "Cheers to whoever picked up and bagged the trash along Route 5 on Saturday. It looks great!" Never one to pass up a chance to take a bow for his group and publicize its efforts, Bill Davies penned the above letter to the editor.

Someone is watching and appreciates our efforts, so let's give a big "Hurrah!" to those intrepid club members who gave up a Saturday at the mall looking for an Easter outfit and answered the call of duty: Tom Armour, Phyllis Johnson, Pat Healy, Dick Mahone, Marilyn Lewis & Mac Lundy, Marilyn Zeigler, Bill & Mary Kafes, Bob Fritts, Charlie Rend, Bob Morris and Sam Fletcher.

Any other members interested in joining the pickup crew should call Bill at 253-1461.

## FIELD TRIP COMING UP

Julie Hotchkiss will lead the next field trip to York River State Park on Saturday, April 21. As usual, the group will gather in the parking lot on the right side of the C.W. Visitor Center at 7:15 and leave at 7:30 AM.

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

They are here, they are here! Have you noticed the new apparel Goldfinches are sporting or the new variety of music coming from your backyard? Things are really beginning to happen with all the flowers blooming and insects flying. I hope our members have had the opportunity to be outside and look for the things that spring is bringing us. Migratory birds are arriving daily and many resident birds are already preparing for their

young. That includes the wrens that moved in to our canoe early this year and deposited four eggs before we could block it off. Oh well, another spring without the canoe.

I am visiting York River State Park to begin our migration walks. The first bird I saw was a white-eyed vireo. That got my day off to a good start. I am still looking for interested people to come along and help lead. Until I get some help, I will work the walks around my schedule alone. If interested be sure to call me ahead of time. I'll go out every weekend when possible until the end of May. The park is open to the idea and wants us to get involved. Any help would be appreciated. Be sure to get out and see what is visiting. You may miss a once in a lifetime opportunity. I hope to see everyone at the April meeting. Happy Birding!! Lee Schuster

## NEW MEMBERS

Let's all welcome Jean and John Bruce as new members of the Williamsburg Bird Club.

## KIPTOPEKE '96 HAWK REPORT

*Hawk Observations from K.E.S.T.R.E.L. News & Notes, March '97*

<u>Species</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1995</u>
Black Vultures	2,630	2,127
Turkey Vultures	12,417	8,034
Osprey	5,775	5,762
Bald Eagle	354	264
Northern Harrier	1,065	1,697
Sharp-shinned Hawk	23,105	25,355
Cooper's Hawk	2,511	3,625
Northern Goshawk	21	14
Red-shouldered Hawk	140	183
Broad-winged Hawk	3,653	5,211
Swainson's Hawk	4	6
Red-tailed Hawk	2,370	2,083
Rough-legged Hawk	0	1
Golden Eagle	32	37
American Kestrel	11,331	20,682
Merlin	2,282	2,126
Peregrine Falcon	<u>1,428</u>	<u>965</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69,118</b>	<b>79,182</b>

*(Excerpts from the analysis)*

Brian Sullivan's detailed report of results indicates that weather conditions, particularly in September, may account for much of the differences in these totals. Brian notes, "September, 1996 was characterized by well above-normal temperatures and an excessive amount of westerly winds. These two factors combined to produce a count of only 16,669 birds." This compares with almost 43, 000 birds in September 1995.

*(The difference in counts is particularly obvious in the smaller hawks, the Kestrels and the Sharp-shinned Hawks. Brian Sullivan's analysis continues.)*

"Northeast winds are needed to bring large flights of these small hawks to Kiptopeke and these winds were few and far between in September 1996. The west and northwest winds which were excessive this past fall, may have sent some of these small birds to the east, out of sight of Kiptopeke observers.

With warm temperatures, warmest just before this September's weather fronts, the migrants flew high undetected by the hawk-platform observers."

## MARCH FIELD TRIP

Randy and April Coleman led the field trip at the Vineyards and were perfect hosts. It was a cool, sunny morning, fine for spotting the following birds: Meadowlark, Junco, Tufted Titmouse, Pine Warbler, Golden and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Field Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow and Red-bellied Woodpecker.

## FIELD NOTES

We are happy to report that the Evening Grosbeak has NOT disappeared entirely from our environs. Judith and Carl Brown finally saw the first to be reported this year and they saw it at Windsor Forest. And Tom Armour, who turns up some very nice birds every now and then, got a Red-necked Grebe at Diascund Reservoir. Our returning migrants were fairly well reported with Yellowthroat Warbler and Pine Warbler reports from all over, a Palm Warbler at Hog Island, a Louisiana Water Thrush at Hickory Sign Post bridge and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at Jamestown Island. Martins at Berkeley school and Rough-

winged Swallows at Jamestown Island have been added to the previously reported Tree Swallows. Most of our winter residents continued to be reported in March.

**Jamestown / James River** Horned Grebe, Great Egret, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Black Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Black Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, King Rail, Laughing Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Royal Tern, Forester's Tern, Great Horned Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Tree Swallow, Rough-winged Swallow, Brown Creeper, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Meadowlark, Cowbird.

**Hog Island** Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Tundra Swan, Green-winged Teal, Pintail, Shoveler Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Common Merganser, Black Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Kestrel, Coot, Laughing Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Tree Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Palm Warbler, Swamp Sparrow.

**Chippokes** Wood Duck, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Kestrel, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Tree Swallow, Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Meadowlark, Rusty Blackbird, Cowbird.

**Camp Peary** Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Laughing Gull, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Black Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Kestrel, Coot, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Common Yellow-throat, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Killdeer, Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Fish Crow, Brown-headed Nuthatch.

**Other York River** Common Loon, Snowy Egret, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup.

**Kingswood** Wood Duck, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk,

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Pine Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Barred Owl.

**Miscellaneous and Neighborhoods** Queen's Lake reports Green-winged Teal, Shoveler Ducks, Red-breasted Merganser, Clapper Rail, Phoebe. Kingsmill reports Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Red-shouldered Hawk, Royal Tern. Reported from the Hickory Sign Post Bridge (now closed for renovation) come reports of Wood Duck, Phoebe, Hairy Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush. At the Vineyard were House Wren, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Graylin Woods reported a Great Horned Owl. The wonderful Evening Grosbeak report came from Windsor Forest and Tom Armour's Red-necked Grebe was in Diascund Reservoir.

## SPRING COUNT MAY 11

The Annual Spring Bird Count with all of the migrants in full flight will be held on Sunday, May 11. The area covered is very much the same as that covered for the Christmas count. It is broken up into these nine areas: Middle Plantation, Skimino, Camp Peary, Cheatham Annex, Hog Island, College Woods, Kingsmill, Jamestown Island and Jolly Pond.

Warm weather makes this count for everyone. Newcomers will undoubtedly see some new birds. Listers will add to their three month lists and maybe even push up to their goals. Older members can pick an area that they haven't birded for a while. So call Brian Taber, the organizer of this count and pick an area that you would like to cover or let Brian assign you to places needing more help. But don't miss the most exciting time of the year to be out in the field and spotting birds. Brian's number is 253-1181.

By the way...Brian Taber has been responsible for the Spring Bird Count for the past very many years. While the duties are not onerous Brian thinks that maybe it is time that he let someone else take on this responsibility. Here is what is involved:

1. Select a date as close to the first Sunday in May as is practicable. (This year there were conflicts with May 4 and May 18. That left only May 11 and possible Mother's Day conflicts to deal with.)
2. Call the list of folks who cover the nine areas and let them know the date of the event.
3. Provide them with any instructions that seem required. (Most of these area leaders have done this so long that no instruction is needed in most cases)
4. Attend a meeting of the area leaders at 5 p.m. to consolidate the area reports into one master count for the area.
5. Give the information to Bill Sheehan.

If you have been enjoying membership in the Bird Club but haven't yet become a contributor, this could be an easy way of broadening your activities, making new contacts and building your knowledge of birds. This is a once-a-year project. Call Brian 253-1181

## **A LETTER FROM DR. MITCHELL BYRD**

"I noticed in the Field Notes Section of the last issue of "The Flyer" the report of an Osprey sighting on February 16 on a duck blind in College Creek. For purposes of bird club records, early sightings now must be viewed with some skepticism.

In the past four or five years, ospreys have begun to winter in eastern Virginia with considerable regularity. There has been one at Lake Smith each of those years as well as several other regulars in lower Tidewater.

On January 7, 1996, Bryan Watts and I flew a mid-winter eagle survey on the James River. During the course of that flight, we saw five different ospreys. One bird was on the Nansemond River one on the Isle of Wight County shoreline, one at the Surry side of the ferry landing, one near Flowerdew Hundred Plantation, and one at Curles Neck Farm.

I only point this out to emphasize that an early arrival may really be a wintering bird, something that I do not believe would have occurred a

number of years back.

Sincerely, Mitchell"

## **YORK RIVER STATE PARK MIGRATION WALKS**

This project was mentioned in last month's *Flyer*. Anyone interested in participating in the walks or helping to lead them should give Lee Schuster a call. She is not available every weekend and doesn't plan on doing it all alone, so get involved and help the club, the park and our community spread the excitement about birds.

## **RARE SIGHTINGS IN VIRGINIA**

It is not an unusual experience for most of us to see a bird that looks a bit unusual and then go to our books to find nothing that seems to fit, except for a "San Louis Obispo Canyon Wren" with a territory limited to coastal California. Ninty nine percent of the time we are looking at a much more common bird that is the lesser known female, an immature, a bird in its non-breeding plumage, poor lighting on our target bird, or any one of many factors that can make identification difficult. Or to quote our sometimes cynical keeper of club records, Bill Sheeran, "People frequently see what they want to see."

However, there is always that one tenth in a hundred chance you're seeing a true stranger. What then? The Virginia Society of Ornithology has an established a system of dealing with unusual claims and the strange sighting can be submitted to this process for certification as a true Virginia sighting of this bird.

The decision to list or not is made by a committee composed of a Chairman, a Secretary-compiler and nine voting members known as the Virginia Avian Records Committee (VARCOM). These voting members include our own Bill Williams. This committee reviews written reports of the field marks identified, the behavior of the bird, the date and time of the sighting, photographs (if any), sound recordings (if any), numbers of sightings and by whom and whatever additional evidence is submitted.

The committee also updates the Virginia check-

list. Last August the committee removed from the list the Ivory Gull, Boreal Owl and Cassin's Kingbird as a review of their records proved too sketchy to be accepted by today's standards. The committee added The Snowy Plover, Common Murre and Hoary Redpoll, recent additions which did meet rigorous standards.

VARCOM also approved the following sightings:

**Band-rumped Storm-Petrel** — a second accepted sighting but the first in Virginia. The other was at sea.

**Ross's Goose** — photographed at Chinoteague and the fifth sighting.

**Black Scoter** — on Beaverdam Reservoir in Loudoun County, the fifth record.

**Ferruginous Hawk** — photographed on the Eastern Shore and seen by many observers, first or second state record depending on the outcome of a previous claim, not yet settled.

**Snowy Plover** — photographed and videotaped on Cedar Island, Accomack County, a first record and one made by **Bill Williams**.

**Little Gull** — photographed at Dulles Airport, Loudoun County, a first.

**California Gull** — sighted at Fort Story and a fourth recorded sighting.

**Common Murre** — photographed 50 miles east of Cape Henry, a first recording and done so by **Brian Patteson** a frequent speaker at Williamsburg Bird Club.

**Western Flycatcher** — photographed on the eastern shore, Northampton County.

**Vermilion Flycatcher** — photographed at Wood-bridge, Prince William County and is a second state recording.

**Gray Kingbird** — photographed at Chincoteague, is a fourth Coastal Plain record. A fifth record was established by **Bill Williams** at Kiptopeke, also with a photograph.

**Bewick's Wren** — sighted in Fairfax County over a three-day period.

**Northern Shrike** — a fourth record was established by a sighting at Lucketts, Loudoun County and a fifth by also in Loudoun County in a different locale

**Hoary Redpoll** — seen on several occasions and

photographed in Highland County is a Virginia first.

Some birds now under investigation that are close enough to stir interest among our club members are **Rufous-necked Stint, Craney Island; Thayer's Gull**, Henrico County and Virginia Beach; **Kirtland's Warbler, Hog Island; Mew's Gull**, Virginia Beach; **White-winged Junco**, James City County; **Northern Wheatear**, Kiptopeke State Park.

So, if you would like to become immortalized in the VSO records, look sharp, take notes of strange sightings and get a photograph if you can. Then talk to Ruth Beck, Bill Williams, Brian Taber, Tom Armour or Bill Sheeran.

## WORKING ON FIELD PROJECTS WITH RUTH BECK

From time to time, Professor Ruth Beck has field research projects that require some helping hands to complete. For instance, last week Ruth needed to string lines to define areas in the nesting places of the Common Terns and Black Skimmers. These spaces, located on an island above the Hampton Roads Bay Tunnel, will soon be occupied by migrating terns and skimmers. Bill Holcombe, Dick Mahone and Phil Young spent an interesting and enjoyable morning putting the strings in place.

At other times the projects may involve counting nests, eggs or chicks, putting up signs, or putting protection around nesting birds. There is a host of things Ruth has to do to keep the nesting areas she's studying viable. She is always willing to explain why it is you're doing what you are and that gives you an insight into some important research work as its being done.

If you think you would like to participate in one of Ruth's projects, leave a note with Lee Schuster or Bill Holcombe at a Bird Club meeting. A list of research helpers will be kept and as these projects come up people on the list will be called until enough volunteers are in place to do the job. Be prepared to get your hands dirty, to ward off bugs and sometimes "dive bombing" birds and to sweat a little — but it always works out at the end of the day to be a satisfying project most ably led.