



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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NEXT MEETING AND NEXT FLYER

We won't meet again until next fall, when we will again assemble in Room 117 Millington Hall on September 16. Ruth Beck will lead our next Field Trip to Craney Island. That will be in August. The next Flyer will combine the months of July and August and will come out in early August with the details on the Craney Island trip. Have a happy summer and see a lot of birds!

FIELD TRIP TO THE DISMAL SWAMP

Despite the threatening weather, thirteen birders joined Don Schwab at the Dismal swamp on May 23. It turned out to be a bit of a struggle with the conditions — very hot and humid and just as buggy as Don had warned about at the Wednesday meeting. A misty drizzle began near the end of the effort. The trees and underbrush were very thick, making bird sighting difficult.

Despite all of that some people DID HEAR the Swainson's Warbler, the bird found only in the Dismal Swamp and sought after by birders from all over the world. An interesting sidelight was that Don Schwab had marked places along the Jericho ditch where he had heard the Swainson's as an aid to a biologist from the Smithsonian who was there making a study of the bird. Don also had a fascinating running commentary on the flora, fauna and history of the swamp. In fact, despite the trying conditions most of this group want a return trip next spring, but about a month earlier next time.

Birds identified, more by sound than by sight,

included Wood Duck, Green-backed Herons, Eastern Wood Pewee, Great-crested Flycatcher, White-eyed and Red-eyed Vireo, Prothonotary Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Acadian Flycatcher, Hairy, Downey and Pileated Woodpeckers.

Participants included Marilyn Ziegler, Bill Williams, Dorothy Whitfield, Charles Rend, Dave Schultz, Alex and Mike Minarik, Tom McCary, Bobbie and Ron Giese and Joy Archer. Our apologies for not listing one other couple we did not identify because so many regular bird walkers were out of town.

FIELD NOTES FOR MAY

Tom Armour spotted a very infrequently seen Black Tern while riding the Ferry to Hog Island. Grace and Joe Doyle found birding at Camp Peary very productive this month. Their best trip was 84 species on the Spring Count. There was no week with less than 65. Along with the spring migrators they found Ruddy Ducks and Red-breasted Mergansers still on the water and Waxwings and a Junco in the woods. While all the Loons appear to have left the York River, Julie Hotchkiss spotted one on the James off First Colony. Bill Sheehan believes that he has Chimney Swifts nesting in their namesake at his house. Brian Taber found some interesting birds in Kingswood, including Bay-breasted Warbler, Veery, Gray-cheeked Thrush and Swainson's Thrush. Marilyn Ziegler had Rose-breasted Grosbeaks on her feeder and saw a Redstart at Basset Woods. Lee Schuster also saw a Redstart at York River State Park. She also had a Blue-winged Warbler and a Yellow

Warbler there. Phil Young's Rose-breasted Grosbeak continued for a while at Phil's feeder. Emily Sharrett spied an Olive-sided Flycatcher at the Chippokes' Swamp. Ospreys, Bald Eagles, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Great-crested Flycatchers, Acadian Flycatchers, Phoebes, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Summer Tanagers and Wood Thrushes were all over the place — Thank God!!

James River and Ferry: Common Loon, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Royal Tern, Common Tern, Black Tern, Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Fish Crow.

Jamestown Island and Nearby Colonial

Parkway: Wood Duck, Black Duck, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Kestrel, Royal Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher. Purple martin, Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, Fish Crow, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Wood Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, White-eyed Vireo, Solitary Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Parula Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Brown-headed Cowbird, Orchard Oriole.

Hog Island and Chippokes: Great Egret, Green-backed Heron, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Kestrel, Greater Yellowlegs, Royal Tern, Common Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Solitary Vireo, Parula Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Brown-headed Cowbird, Orchard Oriole.

Camp Peary: Great Egret, Green-backed Heron,

Wood Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Black Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey, Northern Bobwhite, Clapper Rail, Greater Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Barred Owl, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Fish Crow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Veery, Wood Thrush, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Field Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Bobolink, Brown-headed Cowbird, Orchard Oriole.

York River State Park: Great Egret, Green-backed Heron, Wood Duck, Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawk, Royal Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Wood Thrush, White-eyed Vireo, Solitary Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-winged Warbler, Parula Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Redstart, Prothonotary Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Brown-headed Cowbird.

Kingsmill: Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered hawk, Kestrel, Spotted Sandpiper, Royal Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Barred Owl, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Wood-pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Fish Crow, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Wood Thrush, White-eyed Vireo, Solitary Vireo, Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Brown-headed Cowbird.

DISTRIBUTION OF MEMBERSHIP LIST

In the past our club has had a policy of restricting distribution of its membership list to those Club members (usually officers) who need it to conduct Bird Club business. The intent was to protect Club members' privacy and to minimize the potential for misuse of the list for commercial or political purposes. The Executive Board is currently considering a proposal by the president to change that policy to allow distribution of the membership list to any Club member who wants one. The reason for this would be to facilitate communication and social interaction among Club members.

In order to evaluate the privacy question the Executive Board wants to hear from members for whom this may be a concern. If for any reason you prefer that your name be omitted from an unrestricted membership list, please contact *Flyer* editor (and roster keeper) Phil Young at 229-8556 or send him a note at P.O. Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187.

NEW MEMBER

Tomoko Hamada, 197 The Maine, Williamsburg joined the Bird Club this month. Welcome!

BIRD OF THE MONTH

by Bill Holcombe

Scarlet Tanager

The Scarlet Tanager, one of the most dramatically beautiful birds to visit us at this time of the year, must bring joy to the heart of any observer who spots this brilliant red bird with the black tail and black wings, as it moves through the tree tops. It is a common spring transient and occasionally breeds here, but because it lives in the tall deciduous forest covering much of the peninsula it can be hard to find. I found the bird's story just as fascinating as the bird itself.

Tanagers were named by the Tupi Indians of the Amazon Basin who call these brightly colored birds, *tangaras*. That has been anglicized to Tanager. In all there are 236 species of Tanagers, and all are limited to the western hemisphere. Only

five species reach the northern hemisphere and we get to see two of them, the Scarlet Tanager and the Summer Tanager. Many are poor singers and some have no song at all but, happily, our tanagers are singers who use song as part of their courtship ritual.

The Scarlet Tanager is 6 to 7 inches long, with an 11 to 12 inch wing span. No other North American bird has this color combination. Females, immatures and winter males are dull green above and straw yellow below, with darker wings and tails. They nest in mature deciduous or mixed forests of the eastern U.S. and southern Canada as far west as the Dakotas and are not averse to nesting in suburban areas. After flying thousands of miles, they arrive from the Amazon area of South America during April and are on northern nesting grounds by mid May. The males arrive several days ahead of the females and take up positions at the tops of tall trees to announce their territorial claim with a "buzzy, caroling song" that is robin-like in form. A call note "CHIP-churr" warns rivals of his claim. The females arrive and are attracted by the singing. The males then court them by hopping about on branches below and displaying their scarlet backs.

The female usually builds the nest of loosely assembled twigs and grass lined with finer grass. It may be as much as 75 feet above the ground. Frequently she sings short, hurried songs while doing the building. Four pale blue or green speckled eggs are laid and the two-week incubation is done by the female. About two weeks after hatching the young are ready to fly. The birds feed on most insects found in the trees in addition to slugs, worms, spiders, berries and wild fruit. They have been attracted to feeders with a peanut butter and cornmeal mix.

Life span facts: A bird with a broken wing that was kept as a pet lived 10-1/2 years. A male was found dead nine years after it has been banded.

The Brown-headed Cowbird parasitizes the Scarlet Tanager more than the other North American Tanager.

Bill Sheehan has received several sighting reports this year starting in April and continuing into May. This month's Field Notes list them in Jamestown Island, Chippokes-Hog Island, Camp Peary, York River State Park, Kingsmill, First Colony and

Fords Colony. Historically, sightings have occurred from April 12 to October 16. Our new book lists Jamestown Island and the York River State Park as the two best places to look for Scarlet Tanagers. Happy Birding!

Sources: *The Audubon Society of North American Birds by Terres and Birds of Eastern North America by Roger Tory Peterson.*

HAND FEEDING WILD BIRDS

(I was fascinated reading this article which I ran across in The Audubon Encyclopedia of North American Birds by John K. Terres and would like to try the hand feeding. I thought that our readers might react the same way.) Ed.

“It is not difficult to get a wild bird to come to one’s hand for food. Success will be more assured if one is feeding birds regularly at a special place such as a backyard or garden, and especially while feeding them in the winter, when birds are hungrier.

There are a few simple rules for success in attracting song birds to your hand to feed:

1. Do not try to hand tame birds until you have them accustomed to coming to your feeder.
2. Be sure that your feeders are empty before you try.
3. If you have tried in mild weather without success, try early in the morning of a cold, storm threatening day or after a snow fall or ice storm, when birds are very hungry.
4. If you have been feeding birds at a window-shelf feeder, open the window and put some food in your palm, rest your hand palm up on the feeder and keep perfectly motionless as you hold out food in one hand. If you want to try it at your open feeder, stand by it and keep perfectly motionless as you hold out food in one hand, resting it for steadiness on your feeding tray.
5. Offer a few crumbled pieces of walnut kernels in your outstretched hand (most song birds are very fond of them) or a few sunflower seeds.
6. If a bird flies to your open palm to pick up food, do not stare into its eyes, as this may frighten it.
7. Never, never try to catch a bird after it alights

on your hand. Whether or not you catch it and release it, you will break its trust in you and you may never get that bird to come to your hand again.”

“Some birds that have fed from people’s hands in fall and winter are: chickadees, crossbills, purple finches, flickers, goldfinches, evening and pine grosbeaks, blue jay, gray jay, juncos, ruby-crowned kinglets, mockingbird, red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches, redpolls, pine siskins, tree sparrow, white-crowned and white-throated sparrows, tufted titmouse, pine warbler, downy, hairy and red-bellied woodpeckers, Carolina wren. Birds that have taken food from people’s hands in summer are: bluebird, indigo bunting, gray catbird, American robin, chipping sparrow, summer tanager, wood thrush, red-eyed and solitary vireos. Hummingbirds have come to small vials held in people’s hands, to drink sugar water.”

I hope that if this idea also intrigues you and you try it, that you will let me know what happens.

BILL WILLIAMS’ “SHINY COWBIRD”

The current issue of *The Raven*, Journal of the Virginia Society of Ornithology, carries Bill Williams’ official report of the first sighting in Virginia of the Shiny Cowbird. It has now been accepted as an official recording. On August 18 Bill, along with Brian Taber, were on their way to Hog Island. In the vicinity of Chippokes they spotted a group of Brown-headed Cowbirds in a field. Bill noted, “One of them doesn’t look like the rest.” They stopped and got a good look at the stranger and became certain that it was, in fact, a Shiny Cowbird.

Bill explains that this unwelcome creature has been working its way northward from the Caribbean over the past twenty to thirty years. It was first reported in Florida in 1985. Fortunately, there have been no additional Virginia reports since the sighting in 1996. “The Cowbirds that we have are bad enough,” said Bill, “but the Shiny Cowbird has the same predation practices of the Brown-headed and is even more aggressive in carrying them out.”

The highly honed birding skills of Bill and Brian have alerted Virginia to another potentially destructive problem for our songbirds but we can all hope that there will be a long, long wait for that second finding.