



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 22, Number 9

October 1998

## NEXT MEETING

Next meeting is Wednesday, October 21 at 7:30 PM in Room 211 Millington Hall at William and Mary. Remember, if you're still not used to the idea, that this is on the second floor and above our "old" meeting room.

## HUGH BEARD, WE'RE PROUD TO KNOW YOU!

If you missed the Daily Press story about our Hugh Beard, you would have no way of knowing that our laid back, never ruffled Program Director, who has come up with excellent programming since taking over the job almost two years ago, has been named the Williamsburg-James City County High School Teacher of the Year for 1997-98. Hugh is a science teacher and science curriculum leader at Lafayette High School. He has taught there for eight years.

In the extensive interview in the Daily Press, Hugh came across as the same practical, thoughtful, excellence-oriented person we've gotten to know at bird club meetings and field trips. However, they didn't let his wit and wry sense of humor come to the surface in that story. Hugh, congratulations from all of the Bird Clubbers!

## MEMBERSHIP LISTS AVAILABLE

A Williamsburg Bird Club membership list has been prepared and will be available for distribution. Members may obtain them at regular meetings or on field trips. The Executive Board believes that active members will find the list a convenience.

## A VERY GOOD TRIP TO KIPTOPEKE STATE PARK

Ron Geise led the September trip to Kiptopeke. A wide variety of birds was seen on a cool, breezy day and the four K.E.S.T.R.E.L. staff members made this a very satisfying trip.

Jamie, the hawk banding coordinator started the day holding a merlin that had just been banded and detailing the characteristics of the merlin as compared to other raptors and to song birds. Then Brian, the song bird banding coordinator, and Andy, the educational coordinator, explained the banding process and the statistics generated. He showed a western palm warbler, a black and white warbler, an ovenbird, an American redstart, a cardinal and a yellow-billed cuckoo that had been caught in the mist nets and banded. No birding time was wasted as we lunched on the hawk observation deck, binoculars handy. With Marshall's help the group identified peregrine falcons, kestrels, merlins, cooper's hawks, broad-winged hawks, sharp shinned hawks, ospreys and red-tailed Hawks.

A move to the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge produced pied-billed grebes, blue-winged teals, mallards and an immature little blue heron. A black-crowned night heron was spotted near Fisherman's Island. Crossing the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel we turned up ruddy turnstones, forrester's terns, brown pelicans and great black-backed gulls.

The group also found and dissected an owl pellet containing small rodent bones and a crab claw leading these Bird Clubbers to conclude that the owl had dined on surf and turf at a local eatery. The "clubbers" included Marilyn Zeigler, Mack

Lundy, Marilyn Lewis, John and Daniel Hoenig in addition to Ron and Bobbie Geise.

## **LEE SCHUSTER TAKES US TO YORK RIVER STATE PARK OCT 24**

As you can see from the September Field Notes, some of the warblers, vireos and other summer migrants were still in the park in September. Lee expects some of them may still be around for the October outing. There should also be migrating fall warblers and forest birds, migrating fall raptors and maybe even some early returning waterfowl. We all know that there are no guarantees in birding but the percentages look good for a fine fall day on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Lee suggests that everyone meet her inside the park near the headquarters area. There is an entrance fee of \$2 a person but that has been transferred to a per car charge in the past when the group is birding. However, as of this time Lee has not been able to get a confirmation of that point.

## **WORTHY CAUSES SUPPORTED BY OUR DUES**

The Bird Club Executive Board met recently and on the agenda was the subject of donations to carry out the purpose of the Club. As stated in the By-laws, "The purpose of this Club is to promote interest in the study of wild birds and in the protection of birds and their habitat." The following contributions were approved:

- |                                     |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Student Research Grant(s)        | \$600 |
| 2. Williamsburg Regional Library    | \$125 |
| 3. The Land Conservancy             | \$100 |
| 4. The U.S. Nature Conservancy      | \$ 50 |
| 5. K.E.S.T.R.E.L.                   | \$ 50 |
| 5. Toano Middle School Bird Project | \$ 50 |

Again this year, two William and Mary students were found equally deserving of our help. The \$600 grant will be split between them. We have helped The Williamsburg Regional Library buy bird books over the years and there are now several shelves of excellent books there. Our contributions are noted on the inside covers. Our local land conservancy is seeking to raise

money to buy the Mainland Farm, which will eventually become a fine bird habitat. The National Nature Conservancy also buys and sets aside land for natural purposes.

K.E.S.T.R.E.L. is dedicated to the research and education programs at Kiptopeke. And the Toano Middle School, under Lee Schuster's guidance, has become an outstanding participant in the National Audubon Society school program to interest children in the study and preservation of wild birds.

## **LOCAL BIRD HOTLINE**

The idea of establishing a Bird Club hotline to alert interested members of the presence of rare or especially interesting visiting birds, has been discussed off and on for some time, never reaching a clear decision. It will take effort to create a telephone "tree," of persons who will make calls when notified and to establish procedures of reporting and communication. But we don't know how much interest there is in the club to receive this information and to participate in the procedures.

Will you please inform Joy Archer at 229-1432 if: (1) You would like to receive such calls, (2) You are willing to participate in passing on information to other club members.

## **BACK YARD BIRD COUNT**

The National Audubon Society has announced the next Backyard Bird Count will take place on the weekend of February 19, 20, 21 and 22. This is a simple yet very ambitious program. All that you do is record all of the species that you observe in your yard during that four day period and the number of separate birds observed. You then report your findings to the Cornell web site <<http://birdsource.cornell.edu>>. This project is being supported by Wild Birds Unlimited. If you do not have access to the web site you can take your information to the store and they will get it transmitted.

The announcement from Audubon states: "Simply put, Cornell and Audubon ask you to help us count birds over a four-day weekend and enter the results through the BirdSource website. Then our

scientists can get an accurate picture of where the birds are just prior to the commencement of spring journeys north. This allows all of us the ability to see where the birds are and how many there are — invaluable information for developing bird conservation plans and in helping to keep common birds common.”

They are also initiating a new communications program for chapters and bird clubs which will provide information to newsletter editors via E-mail. We will keep you informed.

## A MOUNTAIN OF TRASH

Bird Club members of the Highway Pickup Crew gathered more trash on September 26<sup>th</sup> than at any time in the eight year history of our effort: Tires, plywood, wallboard, packing cases, electrical boxes (with 16-foot trailing pipe) and cable casing. And, of course, there was the usual collection of refuse and garbage. In all, the team picked up the equivalent of 43 bags of refuse. In addition, 192 lb of glass and plastic bottles and 23 lb of aluminum cans were recycled requiring three hours of sorting.

Sixteen members contributed to the effort: Joy Archer, Pat Bostian, Pat Healy, Nadine and son Daniel Hoenig, Bob Fritts, Kathleen Kollman, Walter Kurth, Grant Olson, Chuck Rend, Alice Sargeant, David Shantz, Dorothy Whitfield, Bob Morris, Dick Mahone (with truck), and Sam Hart.

Next pick up date will probably be in late December or early January, depending on the weather. Call Bill Davies at 253-1461 if you would like to be part of the crew.

Congratulations and a hearty “thank you” to all!

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The compilation of the reports from the 1997-98 Christmas Bird Count was just received and it included the dates for the 1998-99 counts.

Traditionally, the Williamsburg Count is the Sunday before Christmas. That fixes our date as December 20, the 90<sup>th</sup> Annual Audubon Christmas Count.

Some of the facts about last year’s count are interesting:

- largest number of separate counts, 1,780.
- largest number of participants, 49,122.
- largest number of species observed in North America, 650.

Williamsburg had 30 observers and identified 108 species. Cape Charles had the highest Virginia count — 147 species. Virginia and D.C. (which are combined in the analysis) conducted 39 counts.

A new species for the Virginia count was the **Yellow-legged Gull** found at Back Bay. A rare, but not brand new species, was a **Ross’s Goose**, also found at Back Bay. The commentary also noted a record number of **White Ibises**, 105, all seen at Cape Charles, and a jump from a record high of four **Common Eiders** to 61, all seen near the mouth of the Chesapeake. **King Eiders** equaled the previous record of eleven but ten Harlequin Ducks broke all previous records. The **Northern Shrike** at Calmes Neck was only the third count listing. **Tree Swallows** blanketed the southeast and eastern shore in numbers never previously recorded. Seven **Prairie Warblers** in five different counts exceeded the old record of two.

## FIELD NOTES

We would like to report some arrival dates next month, so keep your eyes out for those **White Throat Sparrows**, **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, **Juncos**, **Waxwings**, **Brown Creepers**, **Fox Sparrows**, **Winter Wrens** and other woodsy arrivals that come here for the winter. While terribly elusive, the **American Woodcocks** live with us from November until May and have been identified on Treasure Island Road, at the Airport and near Neck-O-Land Road. And don’t forget the **Tundra Swans** and other waterfowl that are on their way. Call Bill Sheehan at 220-2122 to report them. The first **Hermit Thrush** was spotted on Country Road and a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was seen at York River State Park. Some of the water fowl have already shown up— American Wigeon at Hog Island September 15 (a new early date), and Don Geise reported **Blue-winged Teal** on the Eastern Shore. As you can see below many of our summer residents were still around in September.

Bill Sheehan noted his last **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** on September 21. Notables include **Black-bellied and Golden Plover** at Hog Island, and all of these warblers: **Northern Parula, Black and White, Redstart, Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Wilson's Warbler**. Jamestown Island, York River State Park and Kingswood were the observation areas. Summer birds such as **Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, Blue Grosbeaks, and Orchard Orioles** were at Hog Island along with large numbers of sandpipers.

**Jamestown Island and nearby Parkway:** Great Egret, Green-backed Heron, Mute Swan, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Bobwhite, Killdeer, Caspian Tern, Royal Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Fish Crow, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Pine Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting.

**Ferry and Hog Island:** Great Egret, Black Duck, American Wigeon, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Bobwhite, Black-bellied Plover, Lesser Golden Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Caspian Tern, Royal Tern, Great-horned Owl, Northern harrier, Kingfisher, Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Fish Crow, White-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Bobolink, Orchard Oriole.

**York River State Park:** Osprey, Wild Turkey, Bobwhite, Killdeer, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-headed Woodpecker, Great Crested Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Black and White Warbler, Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Blue Grosbeak, Meadowlark.

**Kingsmill:** Great Egret, Green-backed Heron, Mute Swan, Osprey, Cooper's hawk, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Caspian Tern, Royal Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Barred Owl, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Great-crested Flycatcher, Barn Swallow, Fish Crow, Northern Parula.

**Kingswood:** Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered

Hawk, Barred Owl, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Black and White Warbler, Redstart, Ovenbird\*, Common Yellowthroat, Wilson's Warbler\*\*, Summer Tanager.

*\*Seen in B. Sheehan's garden from Sept. 16 to Oct. 2 except for one day.*

*\*\* Observed at length by B. Sheehan and T. Armour on Sept. 14*

**Camp Peary:** Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Green-backed heron, Mute Swan, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Clapper Rail, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pee-wee, Acadian Flycatcher, Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Tree Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, White-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Brown-headed Cowbird.

## **BIRD OF THE MONTH**

### **The Great Crested Flycatcher**

While the last of these birds likely left us in early October, they spend about six months a year here and eat enough insect pests to deserve our attention. Their early arrival date is April 16 and they are fairly common during the spring and early summer months. But whether or not you've identified this bird by sight it is almost impossible to think that you haven't heard its very distinctive, "Wheeepp," in late spring or early summer.

Flycatchers are part of a very large family of birds. There are 378 species of "Old World" flycatchers. The Tyrant Flycatcher is a related family that resides in the Western Hemisphere and contains 374 species. Our flycatcher is one of the 35 that reach the United States. The word "tyrant" applied to this group is an allusion to the aggressiveness of some members of the family. For instance, the Eastern Kingbird, which is part of this family, has been known to land on the backs of intruding crows and yank feathers from them. Terres quotes from a study that observed one attacking an airplane that came into its territory!

There is a group of flycatchers that summer here that are very difficult to differentiate. The Great Crested Flycatcher is not one of these. It is eight to nine inches long with wing spans up to 14 inches. It is olive brown above with a clearly differentiated head crest. The pale gray breast extends up through the throat. The yellow abdomen is an excellent field mark in a bird of this size and general coloring. The tail is long and rufous and there is cinnamon color in the wings, plus white wing bars. It moves with clear, strong definite movements.

This bird arrives from its winter quarters in southern U.S., Mexico or Central America in mid April. The males establish large territories in woodland areas and fight aggressively with other males, tearing at each other with beak and claws. It announces its territorial claim with the distinctive, loud, musical "Wheeepp!" Nesting areas include farm woodlots, wooded glades, borders of woods, parks, old orchards and stands of shade trees. Nests are built in natural cavities, abandoned woodpecker holes and sometimes bird boxes. If the cavity is too deep, the nesting partners fill it with leaves and grass until the base is within 18 inches of the hole and then build a cuplike nest of leaves, grass feathers and, characteristically, cast-off snake skins. Usually five or six yellow-white to pink-white eggs are laid. Incubation takes 13-15 days and the young leave the nest 15-18 days later.

Feeding is done in the usual flycatcher fashion of darting swiftly from a perch to snatch flying insects from the air. They also feed from or near the ground and pull insects from bark crevices. They are known to eat 52 kinds of beetles, wasps, bees, flies, grass hoppers, crickets, moths, butterflies and caterpillars. They also eat all kinds of wild berries and grapes. This is a good bird to have around.

They nest from southern Canada to the Gulf and winter from southern Florida to eastern Mexico and south to Colombia. It will be next April or May before we hear that "Wheeepp" echoing through the woods but when you hear it you will know that the Great Crested Flycatcher is back for another nesting season.

**Reference:** *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres

## STILL HUNTING AT HOG ISLAND

Archery season started October 3 at Hog Island and will continue until November 14 on all days except Sunday. Legal hours are from sunup until half an hour after sundown. Tony Castillo, one of the managers, says that birders are welcome but strongly advises we wear bright clothing, including a fluorescent orange cap. He also suggests that early afternoon hours when hunters are eating or resting is the safest time. Birders should stay close to the main road from the gate to the river.

## WHITE-THROATED SPARROW SWEEPSTAKES RESULTS

After several recounts and great deliberation, the winner of the latest sweepstakes has been determined. And the winner is...Bill Sheehan, of course, with a single bird seen in his back yard on May 15<sup>th</sup> of this year. The runner up was Karen Johnson, who studies birds for a living and so was not eligible for the amazing cash prizes and all-expenses paid trip to the Bahamas. One of Karen's banded birds remained until May 14<sup>th</sup> near campus and nearly everyone else's birds left by May 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to the information from the following people: Joy Archer, Hugh Beard, Joe & Grace Doyle, Ron & Bobbie Geise, Halsey & Nancy Griswold, Julie Hotchkiss, Emily Sharret, Marilyn Zeigler and others, I now have a good picture of the departure schedule of white-throats from Williamsburg. This is important for me in placing my campus study in a regional context. A modified version of the contest, with even bigger prizes, will happen again next year. Stay tuned for details in late winter.

Dan Cristol