



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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NEXT MEETING MAY 19th

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will be held in Room 211 Millington Hall on the campus of William and Mary. Dan Cristol has arranged a program of Bird Photography, by the well known nature photographer, John Orehovec. You will be treated to some wonderful photographs plus some advice from a pro on how to take such pictures.

APRIL FIELD TRIP

The April 24th show at the Dismal Swamp, arranged for by Alex Minarik and directed by Don Schwab, really lived up to expectations this year and proved the value of going in late April as opposed to late May. Schwab is a Wildlife Biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

These warblers were identified by sight and/or sound: blue-winged, northern parula, yellow rump, black-throated green, pine, prairie, black and white, prothonotary, worm eating, swainson's, ovenbird, northern water thrush, common yellowthroat and hooded. Note that it is the northern waterthrush and not the Louisiana that we are more accustomed to seeing in our area. The swainson's, which is so very much identified with the Great Dismal Swamp, was heard but not seen. Just to top off this great day with the migrants, both the black-billed and yellow-billed cuckoos were seen. A total of 42 species were identified.

For those who missed this trip (the wind storm the night before filled my driveway with downed trees!) but would like to do some birding there,

here are the directions: Interstate 64 south to I-664 to exit 13A. Exit onto Rts 13, 460 and 58 Business toward Suffolk. Pass the truck weigh station and branch off onto 58 Business. Just past the Racetrack gas station, go left on Rt.337. At the second traffic light go left on Rt. 642. Go ¼ mile and a small sign on left says, "Jericho Ditch." Take this road to the parking lot and gate. Several trails branch out from here and all are potential. If you should miss the "Jericho Ditch" sign, a bit farther on you come to the "Washington Ditch" which offers comparable possibilities.

SPRING BIRD COUNT REMINDER

Last Month we mentioned the Spring Bird Count, scheduled for May 16. If you'd like to participate, call Brian Taber (253-1181.)

ANNUAL PICNIC AT BECK'S

Once again Ruth and Sherwin Beck have offered to host a picnic for Bird Club members at their home in Barhamsville on Sunday, June 6. Ruth will lead a bird walk on her extensive and lovely property beginning at 4:00 PM.

It'll be a covered dish supper, with members bringing their favorites for the enjoyment of others. Please call Jeanne Armour (229-2363), if you plan to attend. She'll coordinate your food provision with all the others so we have a properly balanced meal. The club will provide the meat dishes, so there's no need to bother with anything that complicated.

Directions to Ruth & Sherwin's house will be

passed out at the May club meeting.

LEE SCHUSTER LEADS MAY TRIP TO YORK RIVER STATE PARK 5/22

In May Alex Minarik has arranged for us to explore York River State Park. The field trip will be led by Lee Schuster, who probably knows birding in that park better than anyone around. With the usual warning about no guarantees, this time of year offers a chance to identify large numbers of woodland migrants. We have high hopes for a good warbler count.

The group will assemble in the Fresh Market parking lot on Jamestown Road at 7:30 AM. If you live west of town, you can join us at the park. We suggest that you wait for us near the gate. It doesn't open until 8:00.

Wild Birds Unlimited is sponsoring another birdwatching field trip which unfortunately falls on the same day. This one is at Chippokes Plantation and will be led by Don Schwab from 9 to 11:30. There is a \$2 fee for parking and registration. The trip starts at the museum. For further info call Susan Heller at 757- 565-4374. If you go, please keep good notes so that others can retrace Schwab's route. Bring those notes to a meeting or mail them to Bill Holcombe and we'll list them in the Flyer.

BLUE BIRD TRAIL UPDATE

Here's the latest news of the bluebird house trail at York River State Park: Once a week the volunteers monitor 42 nest boxes. As of Sunday, April 25th, 27 of the boxes contain nests — 19 bluebird and 8 chickadee. There were over 110 total eggs and two bluebird hatchlings. In May we expect to see many more baby birds. This report courtesy of five volunteers: Dorothy Whitfield, Terry & Jack Johnston, Mark Gleaton and Shirley Devan.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Common Crow by Bill Holcombe

Crows may not be the most lovable of birds but they are too interesting to ignore. We hate it that they rob song bird nests but they are so ever

present that they frequently are the only bird sounds that we hear and on a cold, clear winter day. They can be a welcome reminder that the natural world goes on.

The crow family is large and world-wide. In North America it includes ravens, crows, jays and magpies. The crows as a family have apparently evolved the highest degree of intelligence among birds. Experiments with captive American crows showed that they can count up to at least four, are keen wary birds good at solving puzzles and at performing astonishing feats of memory. They quickly learn to associate a variety of sounds and symbols with food. Some naturalists believe the evidence indicates that crows have a language of their own. They can mimic sounds of cats and dogs and learn human words, although it is a myth that splitting the tongue enables them to speak human languages. By a wide margin the American Crow was the most reported bird in the Great Backyard Bird Count last February. It can live almost everywhere in the United States. In the middle of the country there is a migratory population that summers in Canada and northern United States and winters as far south as Texas.

The crow is black from the tip of his bill to the end of his tail, including the feet. The glossy black has metallic violet tones on the body and metallic blue-green on the wings. This large bird is up to 21 inches long and has a wingspan up to 40 inches. Adult's eyes are brown, immature's are blue. Sexes are outwardly alike.

This bird can eat almost anything and its fondness for gleaning corn and grain from fields, plus young song birds and eggs from their nests, has led to a long history of shooting, poisoning and bombing its roosts. Recent studies show that to be mistaken judgment. They show this to be an economically positive bird. Its diet of insects, weed seeds and gleanings from harvested fields far outweigh its predation. In areas where the food is available it mimics sea gulls by dropping clams, mussels, scallops and sea urchins onto rocks and roadways. Then it extracts food from the broken shells.

It also probably cleans up as much road kill as the vultures do. It coughs up as pellets the indigestible parts of the diet. But, let's face it, it also takes young song birds from their nests as part of its

diet. If we could only train them to concentrate on young cow birds!

It builds nests of twigs, usually high in loblolly pine trees in our area, and lines them with grass, leaves, moss, twine and other softening materials. Four to six blue-green eggs with darker blotches are laid between February and June. The male feeds the female while she is incubating the eggs, about 18 days, and helps feed the young until they can fly, 28-35 days later. Some members of the worldwide crow family are known to form life-long mating attachments but the record on the American crow is not clear. It is also not clear whether the male assists in the incubation.

Crows mobbing hawks and owls are not an uncommon sight in our area, nor is the springtime sight of smaller birds chasing crows from their nest areas. Both are results of nature's food chain.

Miscellaneous facts: The recovery of banded crows show ages between 8 and 14. Albinism is fairly common with many examples. These strong flyers have been clocked up to 32 mph. Weight samples center around one pound plus or minus 5 ounces.

The crow is probably the most familiar bird that we know and while some of us hate him and some of us enjoy his antics, we'd all have to agree that his story is an interesting one.

CORNELL BLUEBIRD COUNT MAY 14-16

This event is sponsored by Cornell Nest Box Network and the North American Bluebird Society. While everyone is aware that there has been a great recovery in numbers of bluebirds a survey will be valuable. But this study is also out to record all of the inhabitants of your nesting boxes. The format of information is not so clear as that wanted for the back yard count. It says: "During the three-day online only anyone [sic] with internet access can enter information. We expect the count to provide a snapshot of cavity-nesting activities early in the breeding season. After the count ends we hope that participants will continue to submit data."

The web site is < Birdhouse Online, <http://>

birds.cornell.edu>. If you would like to participate, assume that the information collection will ask number of boxes you are watching, what bird they were designed for, which are empty, which are occupied and by what. If you don't have internet access, Bill Holcombe will be happy to send your information. Call Bill Holcombe, 4705 Lady Slipper Path, Williamsburg, VA 23188, 229-8057.

FIELD NOTES

Our record keeper, Bill Sheehan, says that migrating shore birds and warblers in our area appear to be running late, perhaps due to the cool weather. "They are either late or they have bypassed us," said Bill. He pointed out that bob white have been strangely silent during April and he did not hear their vocalizing until May 6. Although the April Field Trip to the Great Dismal Swamp was quite productive, local reports have been more spotty. There have been numerous reports of wild turkey since spring gobbler season started April 17. We had two late season notables: Dan Cristol was pointing out a flock of goldfinches to students when he spotted a sprinkling of pine siskin in the midst of them, the first reported sighting of this winter visitor that we've had. Lesser scaup ducks have been rather scarce this winter and then suddenly groups of ten to 25 were seen near the ferry landing all through April. Hummingbirds did join us in number and the ruby-throated hummers have been widely seen. The red-eyed and white-eyed vireos have been heard and the yellow-throated warblers and northern parula have clearly come back. Our swallows are back with the purple martins as are the great-crested flycatchers, wood-peewees, wood thrush, catbirds, and tanagers. Brown thrashers and kingbirds are easy to find.

(We don't report normal residents and very common visitors.)

Jamestown Island

Great egret, osprey, spotted sandpiper, screech owl, ruby-throated hummingbird, belted kingfisher, red-headed woodpecker, eastern woodpeewee, eastern kingbird, tree swallows, ruby-crowned kinglet, hermit thrush, wood thrush, gray catbird, red-eyed vireo, yellow-billed cuckoo,

summer tanager.

Hog Island, the Ferry and Chippokes

Great egret, wood duck, northern shoveler, lesser scaup, black vulture, osprey, bald eagle, northern harrier, sharp-shinned hawk, American coot, black-bellied plover, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, solitary sandpiper, semipalmated sandpiper, dunlin, acadian flycatcher, great crested flycatcher, tree swallow, northern rough-winged swallow, bank swallow, fish crow, brown headed nuthatch, common yellowthroat, indigo bunting, field sparrow, orchard oriole.

Chippokes

Ruby-throated hummingbird, great crested flycatcher, kestrel, wild turkey, prothonotary, northern parula, yellow warbler, pine warbler, indigo bunting, scarlet tanager.

Camp Peary

Mute swan, wood duck, red-breasted merganser, ruddy duck, black vulture, osprey, bald eagle, kestrel, wild turkey, northern bobwhite, spotted sandpiper, belted kingfisher, red-headed woodpecker, eastern phoebe, great crested flycatcher, eastern kingbird, tree swallow, barn swallow, fish crow, brown-headed nuthatch, blue-gray gnatcatcher, veery, hermit thrush, wood thrush, white-eyed vireo, yellow-throated vireo, red-eyed vireo, northern parula, yellow-throated warbler, pine warbler, prairie warbler, palm warbler, ovenbird, common yellowthroat, summer tanager, indigo bunting, field sparrow, brown-headed cowbird.

AUDUBON SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

Saving the Bicknell's Thrush

The Adirondack and Catskill mountain peaks in New York state are the summer home of bicknell's thrush. The rest of the year it lives in the Dominican Republic. Sadly, its numbers have been shrinking alarmingly. However, another temperate northern-southern tropical partnership has been formed to improve the bird's future prospects. A meeting with a delegation from the New York State Audubon Society was hosted by the Club de Observadores de Aves Annabelle Dod in the Dominican Republic. They were brought together by Audubon's Population and Habitat Campaign. Of 26 birds threatened by a loss of

habitat in the Dominican Republic, bicknell's thrush has the highest priority on the WatchList Species List. The WatchList is administered by Partners in Flight, an organization devoted to conservation that the Williamsburg Bird Club has joined.

Partners in Flight Develops State WatchLists

WatchLists identify species in need of conservation attention before the matter becomes last-minute crisis management. "State lists will serve as an early warning system for management agencies, non-government organizations, landowners and the general public," said Frank Gill, Audubon's Director of Science. Compiled by scientists within Partners in Flight, the WatchList targets bird species with declining populations and limited ranges which face threats like habitat loss on their breeding and wintering grounds. An adaptation of the Virginia list follows.

As presented, the list splits the state into four parts based upon topology and then indicates that the concern is of high priority in one or all of them. We collapsed that into one judgement (refer to next page.) A second X in the first two columns indicates that the species is also on the National WatchList. An X in the third column indicates the species is also on Virginia's State Wildlife concern list.

	<u>High Priority</u>	<u>National Watchlist</u>	<u>State List</u>
American Black Duck	X	X	
Black Rail	X	X	X
King Rail	X		
American Oyster Catcher	X		
Whip-poor-will	X		
Eastern Wood-Pee-wee	X		
Acadian Flycatcher	X		
Brown-headed Nuthatch	X	X	
Sedge Wren	X		
Bewick's Wren	X		X
Wood Thrush	X	X	
Yellow-throated Vireo	X		
Golden-winged Warbler	X	X	X
Northern Parula	X		
Black-throated Blue	X	X	
Prairie Warbler	X	X	
Cerulean Warbler	X	X	X
Prothonotary Warbler	X	X	
Worm-eating Warbler	X	X	X
Swainson's Warbler	X		X
Louisiana Waterthrush	X		
Kentucky Warbler	X	X	
Hooded Warbler	X		
Summer Tanager	X		
Field Sparrow	X		
Bachman's Sparrow	X	X	
Henslow's Sparrow	X	X	X
Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow	X	X	X
Seaside Sparrow	X	X	