



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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NEXT MEETING OCTOBER 20

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will be on Wednesday, October 20 at 7:30 PM in Room 117 Millington Hall, William & Mary. Program Chairman Dan Cristol has arranged for one of his students, Emilie Snell-Rood, to make a presentation, "Wetland Birds." Dan says that Miss Snell-Rood is doing top notch biological research that members should find of keen interest.

OCTOBER FIELD TRIP

Jamestown Island will be the destination for our next field trip. We will gather at 8:00 AM October 23 in the parking area on the left, just before the park entrance. There is a \$5.00 fee per adult to enter the park, which opens daily at 8:30 AM. You may want to consider purchasing an annual pass for \$20.00. It entitles you and your immediate family entrance to the park for twelve months. Its five mile wildlife drive offers many birding opportunities that vary with the season.

WINTER RESIDENTS ARRIVING TROPICAL MIGRANTS GO SOUTH

The pleasure of looking up our arriving winter residents is not quite the same thing as searching out the early warblers in April, but it is nevertheless a very real pleasure. We will soon be able to work our way along the York River and Colonial Parkway in search of the red-throated loon and the common loon near the Coleman Bridge and all of those wintering diving ducks from Felsgate Beach to the Yorktown Beach; ring-necked, scaup, goldeneye, bufflehead, hooded merganser, red-breasted merganser and the grebes, pied-billed,

horned, and the more elusive red-necked. Marsh ducks found along the York include American widgeon, canvasback, ring-necks and scaup. Tundra swans will be in the ponds and bays on the landward side of the parkway.

The dabbling ducks will be on Lake Matoaka, the Vineyard ponds, Jamestown Island, Hog Island, Sunken Meadow and other ponds scattered in our area; wood duck, green-winged teal, black duck, northern pintail, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, gadwall and more rarely, redheads. Those diving ducks, the grebes and coot will also be there and on the James River, and also in the Hog Island impoundments.

A trip to the Bay Bridge Tunnel in the winter months offers an opportunity to observe sea ducks like the scoter, old squaw, harlequin, king eider and common eider.

But we also have woodland winter residents to enjoy. White-throat sparrows and juncos will be feeding in our yards and hermit thrushes will dart through our shrubs. The yellow-bellied sapsuckers will be leaving their tattoos on the bark of trees all over the peninsula. Kinglets, ruby-crowned and golden-crowned, will flit through the trees and shrubs. The lucky ones among us will get to see the red-breasted nuthatch, the brown creeper, the pine siskin and the evening grosbeak. A lot more of us will be charmed by the handsome cedar waxwing and the more secretive fox sparrow.

There is a lot to see and do out there this time of the year. And don't forget the hawk observation and banding station at Kiptopeke.

NEW PUBLICATION OF COASTAL VA WILDLIFE CONSERVATORY

The September issue of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Conservatory publication, *News and Notes*, came out at the end of September and a very handsome issue it is. Named K.E.S.T.R.L. when the sponsoring organization started, it began issuing a twice-a-year publication in 1995. These have steadily improved in appearance and content. The most recent issue is graced with three-color photographs throughout, including a dramatic color shot on the card stock cover. The publication is filled with material of interest to all birders. Bill Williams is President, Brian Taber, Vice President and Mitchell Byrd is on the Board of Directors of the organization.

There is an item of special interest for Club members: Bill Williams tells of a potentially important land addition to the Kiptopeke State Park. There is an article about the '98 fall migration, including a fascinating story concerning the migrating merlin, and a recap of last spring's migration figures. Brian Taber also reports on the newest activity — butterfly studies.

If you would like to receive this publication and contribute to the valuable work going on there, you just pick a membership category and send a check with your name and address to CVWC, P.O. Box 111, Franktown, VA 23354. Categories are Individual \$10, Contributing \$15, Family \$20, Sustaining \$35, Benefactor \$100, Patron \$259 and Life \$500.

BIRDING TEAM WINS AGAIN

A medical glitch took Tom Armour out of the game at the last minute so Bill Williams and Brian Taber recruited Fenton Day from Richmond to round out the team at the September 18 Kiptopeke Challenge. Leaving Williamsburg at 5 AM, these eagle-eyed and owl-eared bird sleuths then beat every bush, rock and beach from the Bay-Bridge Tunnel to Chincoteague Island. They rounded up 138 species and won the bronze Woodcock for another year by identifying eleven species more than the next competitor. They also raised \$700 to further the work of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory.

Some of their more interesting finds included sandwich tern and palm warbler at the Bay-bridge Tunnel, and broad-winged hawk, Philadelphia vireo, cliff swallow, worm-eating warbler, grasshopper sparrow, yellow-bellied flycatcher and an early ruby-crowned kinglet at Kiptopeke State Park. Then there was the common moorhen at Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. A field still flooded from tropical storm Floyd just north of Kiptopeke yielded American golden plover, buff-breasted sandpiper and white-rumped sandpiper. Still farther north at the town of Oyster, they added northern shoveler and green-winged teal. Chincoteague produced brown-headed nuthatch, wood thrush, great horned owl, snow goose and yellow-crowned night heron. Our weary threesome then completed the day back at Kiptopeke after dark, finding a screech owl just beginning its shift as they concluded theirs.

Three cheers for the home team of Day, Taber and Williams!

NEW LEADERS FOR ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY CREW

The baton is passed! Welcome to Marc and Pam Meiring, new leaders of the Route 5 highway pickup crew. With their previous experience in other groups they are sure to do an outstanding job. We're delighted with their willingness to serve for this important work of the Bird Club. Bill Davies wants to express "a personal word of thanks to all the club members who have donated their time and energy to make our club's highway cleanup program so successful over the past ten years. Over forty club members came out several times (26 pickup days over the years) to make Route 5 a cleaner road to travel and to improve our environment. Thank you."

The last outing was on June 19th, a beautiful day — sun shining, good, clean Virginia air and not a cloud in the sky — perfect for the pickup crew. For an hour and a half sixteen dedicated club members patrolled the two miles of Route 5 from Five Forks west to Centerville Road. The results: 16 bags of trash plus six bags of recyclable cans, bottles and plastics. Kudos for a quick sweep go to: Sam Hart, Alice Sargeant, Joy Archer, Marilyn Zeigler, Mike & Alex Minarek, Dorothy

Whitfield, Barbara Hitt, Ann Booth Young, Sam Fletcher, Pat Bostian, Bob Fritts, Pam & Marc Meiring and Dick Mahone (with truck.)

NEXT HIGHWAY PICKUP DATE

The next highway pickup date is scheduled for 8:00 AM on Saturday, October 30, 1999. Marc Meiring, chair of the "Adopt-a-Highway Program," says "We will meet in the parking lot of the Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road. If you have any questions about this, please feel free to call me at home (253-2640) or at my business phone (221-8345.)"

SEPTEMBER FIELD TRIP

Bill Williams led the September field trip to the Greensprings nature trail. On this beautiful, post-Hurricane Floyd morning 55 species were seen. They included four warbler species — The magnolia, yellow-throated, pine and common yellowthroat; all of our woodpecker species, four hawks — sharp-shinned, red shouldered, American kestrel and merlin; yellow-billed cuckoos, red breasted grosbeaks, summer tanagers, ruby-throated hummingbirds and several common nighthawks. Participants included Joy Archer, Camilla Buchanan, Shirley Devan, Pat Groeninger, Jack & Terry Johnston, Katie Kollman, Alex Minarek, Chuck Rend, Carol Talbot, Carol Welsh and Dorothy Whitfield.

FIELD NOTES FOR SEPTEMBER

Hurricane Dennis stirred up more interesting bird reports than did the miserable Floyd, which succeeded only in dumping trees, crushing houses and flooding out our area. Near Dennis, Bill Williams identified a Wilson's phalarope and a Mississippi kite at College Creek. Our annotated list indicates that this is the second sighting in our area for the kite. The phalarope is almost as rare, although Tom Armour got another at Hog Island a few days later. Bill Williams and Brian Taber were together when they spotted a Hudsonian godwit and a glossy ibis at Hog Island in the aftermath of Dennis. Marilyn Zeigler's yellow-crowned night heron was still at the Queen's Lake

marina. Joy Archer had the pleasure of seeing a rose-breasted grosbeak at Millcreek. Lee Schuster spotted a hooded warbler at Jamestown Island and a pair of oven birds in her backyard. Both scarlet and summer tanagers plus redstarts were seen in First Colony. And these tropical migrants were still reported; white-eyed vireo, red-eyed vireo, parula warbler, black and white warbler, and common yellowthroat. Also worth noting were the blue-winged teal in the swampy area at Drummonds Field and the not-so-often-seen little blue heron, tri-colored heron and pectoral sandpiper at Hog Island. Bill Williams and Tom Armour have both spotted early arriving white-throated sparrows. Wild turkey were reported on Bushneck Road and on Route 60 East, not far from the Rte. 199 intersection.

Area Reports: *(Note that resident birds and the very common visitors are not usually reported. Phone your sightings to Bill Sheehan at 220-2122.)*

Jamestown Island and South Parkway: Great egret, mute swan, wood duck, osprey, bald eagle, Mississippi kite, killdeer, chimney swift, kingfisher, red-headed woodpecker, wood-pewee, Acadian flycatcher, phoebe, kingbird, purple martin, tree swallow, barn swallow, Blue-gray gnatcatcher, wood thrush, brown thrasher, white-eyed vireo, red-eyed vireo, pine warbler, black and white warbler, redstart, scarlet tanager, bobolink.

Ferry, Hog Island and Chippokes: Great egret, little blue heron, tri-colored heron, green heron, mute swan, blue-winged teal, osprey, bald eagle, sharp-shinned hawk, cooper's hawk, bobwhite, black-bellied plover, lesser golden plover, semipalmated plover, killdeer, American avocet, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, spotted sandpiper, semipalmated sandpiper, western sandpiper, pectoral sandpiper, white-rumped sandpiper, Hudsonian godwit, Wilson's phalarope, short-billed dowitcher, Caspian tern, royal tern, least tern, ruby-throated hummingbird, red-headed woodpecker, wood-pewee, phoebe, kingbird, purple martin, tree swallow, bank swallow, barn swallow, fish crow, wood thrush, brown thrasher, white-eyed vireo, red-eyed vireo, pine warbler, blue grosbeak, bobolink, glossy ibis, kingfisher.

Kingswood: Yellow-billed cuckoo, barred owl, ruby-throated hummingbird, phoebe, barn swallow, marsh wren, blue-gray gnatcatcher, veery, brown thrasher, red-eyed vireo, parula warbler, pine warbler, black and white warbler, redstart, summer tanager, cowbird, northern oriole.

Kingsmill: Mute swan, wood duck, osprey, sharp-shinned hawk, killdeer, caspian tern, royal tern, Forster's tern, ruby-throated hummingbird, barn swallow, fish crow, house wren, blue-gray gnatcatcher, brown thrasher, red-eyed vireo, pine warbler, redstart, white-throated sparrow (quite early!)

Camp Peary: Great egret, mute swan, black vulture, bald eagle, kestrel, wild turkey, clapper rail, killdeer, spotted sandpiper, common tern, yellow-billed cuckoo, kingfisher, red headed woodpecker, wood peewee, blue-gray gnatcatcher, gray catbird, brown thrasher, white-eyed vireo, pine warbler, redstart, common yellowthroat, blue grosbeak, vesper sparrow, bobolink, cowbird.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Northern Harrier by Bill Holcombe

North American hawks have two commonly used general classification groups, the accipiters and the buteos. The accipiters tend to be slender birds with long tails and short, rounded wings which make them highly maneuverable in woodland settings. There they hunt primarily for smaller birds, snatching them on the fly from the air or from their perches. The buteos are chunkier, more strongly built birds with broad, soaring wings and wide rounded tails. They are adapted to spotting their prey of rodents, rabbits, reptiles and occasionally, small birds, as they soar at considerable height or sit perched on high trees or posts at the edges of fields. The harriers fall in between these two. They are slim, long-tailed birds with wide, soaring wings and very large ear openings surrounded by owl-like disks of feathers. They are adapted to gliding over open fields at heights of 10 to 30 feet in search of mice, rats, frogs, small snakes, insects and small birds. The northern harrier is the only North American harrier, although its cousins are scattered over many other parts of the world, and is itself found in Europe

and Asia.

The northern harrier is most often identified as the large bird soaring at a low level over open fields with only an occasional flap of the wings, otherwise held at a high slant like a vulture, and which has a conspicuous large, white patch on its rump. Males are pale gray above with lightly colored breasts and under parts, whereas the larger females are predominantly a darkish brown with buffy under parts. Both have the conspicuous white rump patch. Immatures resemble the females but have reddish-brown under parts. Eyes are yellow and legs are long, with orange-yellow talons. Wings are wide and long. Tails are long and slender with a square tip and are crossed by a broad dark band near the tip and four dark lines evenly spaced above that. The large ears with the owl-like swirl of feathers are thought to provide keen hearing that permits the harrier to hear the squeaks and rustling of its prey.

This bird roosts on the ground. Outside of nesting season it frequently forms a roosting community with other harriers.

This harrier is found throughout North America. It frequently winters within its nesting range but the northernmost birds tend to migrate into the lower half of that range during the winter months. By March-April the migrating birds are back on their U.S. and Canadian nesting areas and by May they are in Alaska. Our harriers are referred to in the Annotated List as "*uncommon migrants; recorded all months; Hog Island.*" Terres says that these birds have "a spectacular courtship flight in which the male, with shrill cries, flies in a series of deep U-shaped undulations." This performance can continue even while the female is incubating eggs on the nest. The nest is built mainly by the female, on the ground and commonly near low shrubs or tall weeds in the vicinity of swampy marshy ground. The nest may even be on shrubs or reeds over the water or on a dry knoll projecting from the swamp. Three to nine eggs are laid and incubated for about 32 days. The young fly about 33 days after hatching. Some males are polygamous. Both birds defend the nest, vigorously attacking other hawks that fly over the nesting territory. They drive away crows and even eagles and will dive at a man walking towards the nest. Both sexes utter various shrill

screams, especially *kee, kee, kee; kek, kek, kek.*

This bird is also known as the marsh hawk or marsh harrier. Banding records have identified several birds that are over 16 years of age.

Northern harriers are consistently seen at Hog Island, gliding over the planted fields near the river. They are also seen above the planted fields along the country roads in Surry and above the open fields bordering Bushneck Road. For us it is a unique, one of a kind, bird with a life style all of its own.

115 Total Birds Fledged from Bluebird Boxes at YRSP

The results are in from the 42 boxes on the bluebird trail at York River State Park. Club members Dorothy Whitfield, Shirley Devan, and Terry & Jack Johnston along with park volunteer Mark Gleaton checked the boxes every week for five months.

Almost 70% more birds fledged in 1999 than in 1998. Increased success can be attributed to new locations for about a third of the boxes, which were moved from "house sparrow territory" next to the horse pasture near Riverview Road. Boxes were more evenly distributed along the entrance road from horse pasture to the Visitor Center. Despite predator guards on all boxes, they still fell victim to predators, most likely snakes.

In 1998, 68 total birds (bluebirds & chickadees) fledged from 41 boxes. In 1999, 115 total birds (bluebirds & chickadees) fledged from 42 boxes.

The Data

42 boxes were monitored mid-March to mid-August

Of 42 boxes, all but 11 had nest attempts

Two boxes had 3 bluebird nest attempts

Seven boxes had 2 bluebird nest attempts

118 hatched

84 fledged

41 hatched

31 fledged

Shirley submitted summary data to Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS), which will submit it to the North American Bluebird Society. If you want to enroll your yard's bluebird boxes in the VBS network next year, contact Anne Little, 3403 Carly Lane, Woodbridge, VA 22192. Email: adlmkt@erols.com.

She also submitted data on each box to Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Nest Box Network. If you want to participate in Cornell's Nest Box Network (CNBN) next year, contact them at CNBN, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850. Email: cnbn@cornell.edu. Even if you have only one or two boxes, both the VBS and CNBN will be glad to hear from you.

Thanks go to the staff and volunteers at York River State Park for their willing and eager assistance. Thanks also to the bird club members who spent many hours at YRSP with the bluebirds and chickadees (as well as with the ticks, mosquitoes and chiggers).

If you want to join in caring for the bluebird trail next year, call Dorothy Whitfield, 564-0844; Shirley Devan, 565-4709; or Terry & Jack Johnston, 220-0910.

Bluebirds in 1999

43 nesting attempts

181 eggs

Chickadees 1999

9 nesting attempts

51 eggs