



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 24, Number 7

July - August 2000

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will be at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, September 20 in Room 117 Millington Hall on the campus of William and Mary. Program Director Dan Cristol will announce the program in the September *The Flyer*.

CRANEY IS. TRIP AUGUST 19th

Those who like shore birds have frequently found the trips to Craney Island to be memorable ones. With the southern migration now underway the chances of seeing some unusual birds are good, but with no promises made. The weather has cooperated beautifully over the past few years but you should come prepared for a hot, sunny day with some active mosquitoes. Long sleeves, long pants, hats and bug spray are recommended. Water, cold drinks and some lunch are also in order. Craney Island is toured by car with frequent stops, so you need not worry about lugging things around.

We will meet in the Colonial Shopping Center parking lot near the Jamestown Road side at 7:15 a.m. Saturday, August 19 and leave by 7:30 using as few cars as are necessary. The Colonial Shopping Center is on Jamestown Road just west of 199 and is the one with the Fresh Market and the Polo Club.

FIELD NOTES FOR JUNE-JULY

June - (Camp Peary species reports of four weekly trips from Grace and Joe Doyle) - **brown**

pelican, great egret, green-backed heron, mute swan, wood duck, black vulture, osprey, bald eagle, wild turkey, bobwhite, killdeer, laughing gulls, common tern, barred owl, ruby-throated hummingbird, belted kingfisher, red-headed woodpecker, phoebe, great-crested flycatcher, eastern kingbird, fish crow, brown-headed nuthatch, blue-gray gnatcatcher, wood thrush, cedar waxwing, white-eyed vireo, red-eyed vireo, parula warbler, yellow-throated warbler, pine warbler, prairie warbler, ovenbird, common yellowthroat, yellow-breasted chat, summer tanager, scarlet tanager, blue grosbeak, indigo bunting, rufous towhee, field sparrow, brown-headed cowbird.

July 1 - Culpepper, Va. After reading the Audubon e-mail reports about the **scissor-tailed flycatchers**, drove up to Mountainside Road off of Virginia 522, just across the Rapidan River, and found the nest and male and female scissor-tails. Along the road also found a **grasshopper sparrow** and scared up a **wild turkey**. Found neither the reported **dickcissels** nor the **logger-head shrike**.

July 16 - Craney Island - (From Virginia Audubon e-mail report.) Good number of shorebirds showing at Craney. At the north impoundment there were seven **American avocets** and a **white-rumped sandpiper**. A **whimbrel** was on the sandbar in the river. Others included **brown pelican, great blue and little blue herons, great white and snowy egrets, black ducks, northern shovelers, least, western and semipalmated sandpipers, yellowlegs, dowitchers and willets.**

July 16 - Queen's Creek: Joe sees 24 **great egrets** in Queen's Creek. Then on July 23 he sees 43 at Camp Peary where a pond is being drained. Then

on July 30 Joe sees 100 or more **great egrets** at the Beaver Dam at Camp Peary!!! Joe has no explanation for this phenomenon but finds it quite remarkable.

July 17 – Scotland Ferry and Hog Island: Lots of gulls at ferry with **laughing gulls** outnumbering **ringbills** by four to one. Many, many immature **laughing gulls**. (Reminder—Ask Ruth where these gulls nest.) One **osprey** fishing the river and one on each of the channel markers with remains of nests also present. Just two **double-crested cormorants** observed. A stop at Chippokes Swamp turned up one **blue-gray gnatcatcher** accompanied by a chorus of very loudly croaking frogs and many burbling **red-winged blackbirds**. At Hog Island entrance found a **blue grosbeak** singing from top of shrub and an **indigo bunting** sitting on phone wire. Handful of **Canada geese** and five **lesser yellowlegs** found on first pond with five **immature bald eagles** bathing in the shallows on the far right. Five **black ducks** on the next pond with unidentified repetitive bird song coming from the marsh grass. Roadside wires hold **eastern kingbirds** with young **tree swallows** and **purple martins**. Three **great egrets** scattered in left ponds with a **royal tern** cruising over one of them and several **bobwhites** calling from the roadside at far end. Also seen: many **great blue herons**, **mocking birds** and **cardinals**. Saw **rough-winged swallows** waiting for return ferry.

July 22 – Grace Doyle walking up the Country Road from Kingsmill found a **warbling vireo**. “I didn’t want to claim it until I verified the field marks with Tom Armour and Joy Archer, but I am now certain that it *was* what I thought it was,” she said. Club records show just seven previous records for this bird.

July 27 – Jamestown Island – Crossing causeway saw two osprey. At first stop near Tarpitch Swamp: **ovenbirds** singing in the trees behind, two **pine warblers** in small tree at side of road, **belted kingfisher** on limb over the water, **king bird** on limb on near side of water, **flickers** all over the place. Thought that I had a rarely seen olive-sided flycatcher until Joy Archer pointed out that the **eastern wood pewee** also has a gray breast with a white stripe down the middle and my notes showed a light colored lower bill. So I had an **eastern wood pewee**. (Oh, well!) On slow

drive around the island saw **summer tanager**, **great crested flycatcher**, **blue-gray gnatcatcher**, **scarlet tanager** on low limb twenty feet away (watching me!!), two **red-headed woodpeckers** and a **pileated**, another **eastern pewee**, **brown thrasher**, several **fish crows**. Catch up with Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Beard cycling with baby in tow and Hugh identifies “hiccup” bird sound as **Acadian flycatcher**.

July Report from Camp Peary – Grace and Joe Doyle made four trips: **great egret**, **green-backed heron**, **mute swan**, **wood duck**, **osprey**, **bald eagle**, **kestrel**, **wild turkey**, **bobwhite**, **clapper rail**, **killdeer**, **laughing gull**, **common tern**, **yellow-billed cuckoo**, **chimney swift**, **ruby-throated humming bird**, **belted kingfisher**, **red-headed woodpecker**, **eastern wood-pewee**, **Acadian flycatcher**, **phoebe**, **great crested flycatcher**, **purple martin**, **tree swallow**, **barn swallow**, **fish crow**, **brown-headed nuthatch**, **blue-gray gnatcatcher**, **wood thrush**, **brown thrasher**, **white-eyed vireo**, **red-eyed vireo**, **yellow-throated vireo**, **parula warbler**, **yellow-throated warbler**, **pine warbler**, **prairie warbler**, **ovenbird**, **common yellowthroat**, **yellow-breasted chat**, **summer tanager**, **scarlet tanager**, **blue grosbeak**, **indigo bunting**, **field sparrow**, **orchard oriole**.

CLUB LOSES ALICE SPRINGE

Alice Springe passed away early in July after a lengthy illness. She was a charter member of the Bird Club who rarely missed a meeting and often joined club officers for dinner at the old Short Stop Restaurant prior to meetings.

Since the founding of the Club she served as liaison with the Williamsburg Library regarding the Club's annual contribution to the library's collection of bird books. She called herself, “a confirmed back yard birder.”

MANY HANDS — LIGHTER WORK

For the past three years, John Eberhardt, has lightened the monthly job of getting *The Flyer* to you by processing the mailing after the pages have

been duplicated. He now needs to spend a good deal of time on out of town family matters and can't always plan around the day to get the mailing to the post office at the right time. Many thanks to John for his help!

Still, we hope that there is someone else out there who has enjoyed the benefits of the club enough to volunteer two hours a month to help the cause. You can watch TV, listen to music or talk to your spouse while you fold, staple, label and stamp about 130 copies and then drop them at the Post Office. If you are willing to help out the editors this next club year, we will be most grateful. Call Phil Young at 229-8556.

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER, CONTINUED by Bill Holcombe

Hundreds of observers have been attracted to the pair of **scissor-tailed flycatchers** which have nested in the corner of a power-line tower in Culpepper County, off Mountainside Road (County Route 247), which goes off of Route 522, a few yards north of the Rapidan River.

After reading almost daily e-mail reports from the Culpepper nesting site, my wife and I made the very pretty drive up there on July 1. Several cars were pulled off of the narrow country road near the tower and we quickly felt that "we were participating in an event." The nest was pointed out to us and soon the male came swooping out of the tower to sit on a wire fence running along the road. Binocs gave us a wonderful view of this bird sitting in the open about fifty feet away and we instantly agreed that the trip was worth it. Terres describes this bird as "*11 – 15 inches long with the tail accounting for 2/3 of the length; head and hind neck pearl-gray, breast white, back a darker gray and wings and tail more black than gray with white edging on the tail. There is a hidden vermillion patch on the head and touches of scarlet at the shoulders; wing linings and sides salmon pink.*" This is a strikingly beautiful bird. While all that we could see of the female was the long tail sticking up out of the nest, the male flew up and down the fields between the fence and the tower and was in view most of the half hour that we stayed there.

We then went looking for the grasshopper sparrows, dickcissels and nesting shrikes that had been reported in this general area. They would all have been additional life birds for me. While we did find a grasshopper sparrow and startled a wild turkey while doing so, we did not find the others. Overall though, we found this a totally satisfying trip.

Reports as recent as July 28 indicate that only three young birds remain. They are now located in trees beyond the tower and are being fed by the female while the male forages for himself.

While nesting scissor-tails are quite rare in Virginia there are precedents and even recent reports of further sightings. In recent weeks one was reported near Appomattox Courthouse and Brian Taber reports that one was found very recently just north of the Eastern Shore Virginia Wildlife Refuge on Route 600. Two records of the Club indicate one scissor-tail in Charles City County, a mile west of James City County in June 1988 and another at Hog Island in July 1994.

NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD BILL BECOMES LAW

(Excerpts from Audubon Advisory)

In an important victory for birds, President Clinton signed into law the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act. The new law establishes a fund to support partnership programs that will conserve and enhance habitat of the Neotropical birds such as Kirtland's warbler, hermit thrush, black-capped vireo, and Kentucky warbler. At least 75% of the money will go to projects in the Caribbean and Latin America where the birds spend the winters. It authorizes \$5 million per year for five years and funds a maximum of 25% of the money for each project. The remainder will be raised from partners such as businesses, non-government organizations and foreign nations.

Approximately five billion birds of 500 species, including man-endangered species, migrate to North America from wintering grounds in Latin America and the Caribbean annually. Many thanks are due Senator Abraham (R-MI) who championed this legislation through the Senate, along with Senator Daschle (D-SD) and the late Senator

Chafee (R-RI), the original sponsors.

THE KIPTOPEKE CHALLENGE IS SET FOR SEPTEMBER 16

Brian Taber and Bill Williams are again putting together a birding team that will set out to identify more birds in a 24-hour period than any of the competing teams in the Kiptopeke Challenge, formerly known as "The Super Bowl of Birding." As of late July that team also includes Bob Ake and Fenton Day. The purpose of the event is to have fun and to test birding skills against others, but primarily to raise money for Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. When all of this started the money was raised for bird research at Kiptopeke. Expansion has taken the raptor banding to Fisherman Island and the spring migration studies to The Eastern Shore of Virginia Natural Wildlife Refuge. What has not changed is the need for financial support for all of these activities.

"Our" team has done its part by getting first and second places in past competitions. They will defend the first place win of last year. Please continue to support them with some cash for the birds. Mail your contribution of support to Brian Taber, 103 Exeter Court, Williamsburg, VA. 23185 and please mail it before September 9. Make checks payable to "Kiptopeke Challenge." Last year you raised \$700 and "the team" found 138 species, eleven better than the second place team. Overall, approximately \$2,500 was raised last year.

The goals of the Observatory are to contribute to the understanding of bird and insect migration by: promoting, conducting and financially supporting research studies; producing educational materials; serving as a resource of information and networking with other observatories and organizations that provide on-site interpretation.

The southernmost three miles of the Virginia Eastern Shore, from Kiptopeke State Park to the Eastern Shore of Virginia State park and Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge form the heart of the study area. It has already yielded significant insights into the volume, timing, distribution and species diversity of bird and insect migration. It ranks as one of the most

significant migration areas in North America, a vital link in the Canada-South America flyway.

WANT A LOCAL E-MAIL NET?

Sometime back when the Club was smaller there was a "telephone tree" used to alert members to unusual bird sightings and locations. Somehow, as the Club got larger, the tree fell into disuse and several efforts to resurrect it foundered. Now the technology of e-mail offers us another possibility.

I can set up an e-mail address on my computer labeled "birdclubinfo" (AOL kept rejecting any name that included "list"). I can also set up a mailing list of all of the club members who want to receive a weekly report, plus a flash report whenever there is something really special in the area (e.g., the painted bunting, the white pelican, and the scissor-tailed flycatchers, in recent times.) I can get some of that kind of information by monitoring the Audubon Virginia e-mail network, although much of that is of no local interest. The rest would have to come from interested club members.

There are three kinds of information that I hope to get back from this network. First, I want to have the opportunity to go see the unusual bird that shows up within a drive of an hour or so, and I hope to get quick reports of such an event. Participants will also get an immediate report from me to their e-mail files. Second, I need to receive local bird reports so that I can continue distributing Field Reports in *The Flyer*. Bill Sheehan had a broader network to draw upon and with his partner, Tom Armour, did much of the field work that went into those reports. But that source is no longer available. Third, I hope that increasing numbers of you will from time to time give us a narrative report of vacation birding, an especially appealing local birding day, or anything of interest about birds that you observed.

Field Notes in this issue give you examples of narrative reports from Hog Island and Jamestown Island. If you like reading field notes in this form, perhaps you could send me some of your field trips in that form. If you prefer the straight listing of observations, I can use those too.

So, if you want to participate in this network in any way as a receiver or as a contributor, please

send an e-mail with your name, address and e-mail address to <birdclubinfo@aol.com.> I plan to send out a weekly summary of the information that I have received and send same day messages to you of the more unusual birds reported.

HISTORIC CONSERVATION BILL PROGRESSES

(From a news release of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies)

The bipartisan Conservation and Reinvestment Act (Cara, H.R. 701) passed a major milestone on July 25 when the Senate Energy and natural Resources Committee voted 13-7 to report this historic conservation legislation to the full Senate for its consideration. This landmark legislation would provide the largest infusion of federal conservation funds in history, \$40 billion over the next 15 years, most of which will go to various state and local conservation programs.

The bill dedicates revenue from offshore oil and gas leases to a broad range of conservation activities, including wildlife, land and water restoration, historic preservation, outdoor recreation, and conservation education. The House of representatives passed similar legislation in May 2000 by a strong bipartisan vote of 315-102.

Over 52 Senators are now co-sponsoring CARA or related legislation that would reinvest federal outer continental shelf oil and gas revenue into conservation, indicating the growing support for CARA. In addition, all 50 governors have voiced support for these bills or their concepts and have worked to move this legislation through Congress.

\$400,000 FOR VA BIRDING TRAIL

You may recall the club meeting speaker last winter who introduced us to the concept of developing a wildlife and birding trail for Virginia. That project got a boost recently when the Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board approved \$300,000 for the trail as a transportation enhancement project. The other \$100,000 came from the Department of Environ-

mental Quality's Virginia Coastal Resource Management Program. That money goes to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to support development of the coastal phase of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. The agency will use the money to determine the routes that make up the trail, to develop a trail map and to create signs for the coastal portion of the trail.

The purpose of this trail is to bring more money into Virginia from people coming here to use it. The news release says that 2.2 million people spend \$700 million a year on wildlife watching in Virginia. Some of us question whether that will benefit the birds and wildlife of Virginia.