



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 25, Number 8

September 2001

NEXT MEETING SEPTEMBER 19

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will be at 7:30 p.m., on September 19, in Room 117, Millington Hall on the campus of William & Mary. Dan Cristol has arranged for Brian Taber, to discuss observing and identifying migrating hawks. Brian has been involved with the hawk watches at Kiptopeke and has conducted his own migrating hawk watch. He watches from a place on the shore of the James near the outlet of College Creek. It's a favorite river crossing location for many north-bound hawks during the spring migration. He will help you to identify those distant silhouettes that are a learned skill of hawk watchers.

Important notice re: November meeting: The third Wednesday in November falls on the 21st, the day before Thanksgiving Day. Because of the likely number of schedule conflicts that evening, the November meeting will be scheduled one week later on the 28th.

GORGEOUS DAY AT CRANEY IS.

August 26 at Crane Island felt more like the first week in October. Leader Ruth Beck provided clear skies, very pleasant temperatures and a steady breeze to keep the mosquitoes away. And the birds were there. However, a lack of water in the impoundments kept the birds much farther away from us than is usually the case. Despite that nit-to-pick, we all had good telescope views of some very good birds: Glossy Ibis, Black-bellied Plover, Semi-palmated Plovers, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocet, Willet, Spotted Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Dunlin, Stilt, Short-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Phalarope, Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern, Royal Tern, and the "peep"

Sandpipers — Semipalmated, Western and Least.

A real highlight was a Peregrine Falcon zipping by our group about 100 feet away. The Gull-billed Tern put on a fine performance too, close enough for all to see. All told fifty bird species were identified and one red fox sat staring at us long enough for one to think that he might be counting the birders. There were sixteen of us: Tom Armour, Cindy Baker, Ruth Beck, Shirley Devan, Gary Driscoll, Adrien Frank, Bobby Geise, Ron Geise, Rene Held, Bill Holcombe, Linda Scherer, Jandy Strickland, Randy Strickland, Dorothy Whitfield, Bill Williams and Marilyn Zeigler.

MESSAGE FROM PRES. HUGH BEARD

Greetings everyone! I hope you had a wonderful summer. As we begin our fall season of meetings, I have several items to share with you. All have the common theme of involvement.

First of all, I would like to congratulate Shirley Devan and her team of volunteers for a great season of monitoring Bluebirds at York River State Park. (See article page 3.) They oversaw a record number of fledges this season (115!). Better yet, their data will be sent to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology as part of their citizen science program. Isn't that great? They got to watch Bluebirds and contribute to ongoing research.

If this kind of thing interests you and you would like to get involved, I recommend doing Project Feeder Watch, another Cornell program. The only prerequisites for participation are that you have a feeder and that you like to watch birds visit it. For more information, phone them at (800) 843-BIRD

(2473) or visit their website at < www.bird-source.org.>

Another opportunity to get more involved is the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Those of us who are in charge of an area can always use extra pairs of eyes. While most of us spend all day in the field, there are opportunities for folks to participate for a portion of the day. Look for more details later in the year.

In addition, there are two events coming up this fall that may interest you:

In September, the county will be holding three public meetings concerning the development of a Greenway Plan. Let our community leaders know your thoughts on greenspace: how it benefits birds, you, and the entire community. Also, a group of environmental and conservation organizations is holding its annual *Autumn Adventure* (see article on page 5.) on Saturday, October 13th at Jamestown High School. It will coincide with the grand opening of the Greensprings Trail. I would like the club to sponsor a booth at the event. If you can volunteer some time, give me a call.

Last, but not least, this fall you may receive a phone call from the nominating committee. If you are asked to serve the club in an official capacity, please give it serious consideration. We need you. We are sort of like the Marines — except that 1) we are also looking for women, 2) the commitment isn't for four years and 3) birding isn't usually a threat to life or limb.

We get so much joy from birds. Consider giving some time to help in the preservation of bird populations for the enjoyment of later generations.

GREENWAY MASTER PLAN

Focus Group Sessions

Three Focus Group presentations are being held to gather more information from the community and to comment on draft versions of the plan prepared by the Greenway Master Plan Steering Committee. Locations of the two remaining presentations are as follows:

James City / Williamsburg Community Center — September 20, at 7 p.m.

James City County Library / Norge — September 27, at 7 p.m.

BRIAN TABER TAKES US TO KIPTOPEKE SEPTEMBER 22

Brian Taber will lead our next field trip to Kiptopeke. We can hope to see some of the raptors that will be part of Brian's talk at the meeting the Wednesday before, and perhaps view some of them "up close" at the trapping-banding station. There can be a wide variety of migrants passing through depending upon the weather and the winds. Some of them may also be seen "up close" at the song bird mist nets and banding operation.

Brian will meet us there. Tom Armour plans to make a few stops on the Bay-Bridge Tunnel Islands where we may also run into migrants, both those heading for the tropics and the ones which winter in our area. Red-breasted Nuthatches have already been spotted.

On August 26 the Kiptopeke Hawkwatch reported Kestrel, Osprey, Broad-winged Hawk and Northern Harrier along with their bonus bird, a Mississippi Kite. On September 2 the Kiptopeke Banding Station reported that in the previous six days they had banded 29 species including 13 warblers, e.g. Black and White, Black-throated Blue, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, American Redstart, Yellow-breasted Chat.

Participants are free to drive directly to the Kiptopeke Bird Center. Or, they may meet Tom Armour in the parking lot in front of Wild Birds Unlimited (the Ukrops shopping center) at 7 a.m. We can pool cars there to share the \$10 charge each way on the Bay-Bridge Tunnel. The weather is unpredictable, of course, but wearing long sleeve shirts and long pants and bringing hats and bug spray are probably prudent precautions. You should probably bring lunch and a cold drink. We should be back in the 1:30 - 2:00 p.m. time frame.

COLLEGE CREEK HAWKWATCH

By Brian Taber

The College Creek Hawkwatch is located about two miles south of Williamsburg in James City

County where College Creek empties into the James River. This was the fifth year for the count. There were 938 hawks and vultures of 14 species recorded there during 54 days and 78 hours in 2001. That is the second highest season total (1997 was 1368; 1998 was 720; 1999 was 836; 2000 was 817) and the highest species total for a season. The number of days was a record high, though not the hours. The season ran from February 9 to May 25. There were twelve birds per hour for the season; however, the first half of the season averaged 14, while the second half only averaged ten.

RECORD BLUEBIRD YEAR AT YORK RIVER STATE PARK

by Shirley Devan

Forty-one nest boxes at York River State Park fledged a record 115 bluebirds this season. Volunteers from the Williamsburg Bird Club monitored the boxes from mid-March to mid-August. The previous high was 86 fledged last year.

Numbers of fledged bluebirds have increased each year since 68 bluebirds fledged in 1998. The final four bluebirds fledged Saturday, August 18. New high numbers were also set for nest attempts and number of bluebird eggs: 44 attempts this year against previous high of 43 in 1999, and 192 eggs this year against 181 in 1999. Chickadee nest attempts continued to decrease – only three nest attempts this year vs. five last year. Only twelve chickadees fledged out of our boxes this year.

Nest box data and results will be submitted to Cornell's Lab of Ornithology Nest Box Network and to the Virginia Bluebird Society.

Highlights of the season:

- Volunteers built & installed ten bluebird boxes in February to replace old ones. The park staff was very helpful in removing the dilapidated boxes.
- The Bird Club provided financial assistance and Wild Birds Unlimited granted a generous discount on predator baffles so that the remaining twelve boxes could be fitted with tubular predator guards. Even though every box is now equipped with predator guards, snakes continue to be a problem. Sixty-one

bluebird eggs or nestlings were lost to predation. The snakes' most likely route to the boxes is from overhanging tree branches.

- First ever tree swallow nest attempt. No eggs resulted but tree swallows did build a nest in a box near the Visitor Center.
- All but seven boxes had at least one nest attempt. Eight boxes had two bluebird nest attempts.
- Two boxes had three broods of bluebirds, starting in mid-April.

Bird club members who generously volunteered their time and effort this season were: Dorothy Whitfield, Dorothy Geyer, Chris & Tony Dion, Terry & Jack Johnston and Shirley Devan. The group celebrated the birds' success with a picnic at the park September 1. Thanks also go to the friendly, helpful staff at York River State Park.

Those who want to volunteer next season should contact Shirley Devan at 220-6269 (home phone.)

OUR WINTER VISITORS ARE ON THE WAY

While you may already be seeing some of the tropical migrants passing through on their way south, be on the lookout for our returning winter visitors:

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Winter Wren
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Gold-crowned Kinglet
Cedar Waxwing
Hermit Thrush
Cedar Waxwing
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Pine Warbler
Dark-eyed Junco
Savannah Sparrow
Fox Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Purple Finch
Evening Grosbeak
Pine Siskin

While some of these birds can be found virtually

year 'round, such as the Cedar Waxwing, they are all either more prominent in the winter months or only seen in our area at that time. Some, such as the Red-breasted Nuthatch, the Purple Finch, the Evening Grosbeak and the Pine Siskin tend to be very hard to find, but usually a few get reported every winter. Waterfowl will also be arriving on the York and James rivers and on all of the smaller ponds scattered in between.

Field Notes will appreciate calls when you spot any of these winter visitors.

FIELD NOTES FOR AUGUST

This is a collection of reports called or e-mailed in to Bill Holcombe at 229-8057, <bowljack@aol.com>, 4705 Lady Slipper Path, Williamsburg, VA. 23188. Unless something unusual is involved, the birds seen here year 'round are not usually reported. Arrivals, departures, early dates and late dates and presence of migrants are welcome news.

Reports have been very scarce for August, and so we'll start with an apology to Bill Williams for not reporting a July sighting he called in last month, despite the fact that it was a most interesting one. "There was a Tundra Swan hanging out with a large group of Canada Geese at Glebe Gut near the Gospel Farm, June 30 and July 1. Couldn't find it July 2."

In general, several watchers felt that the bird feeder activity in August was unusually high, but alas, we have no data to back that up.

Aug. 26. — Tom Armour sees first Yellow Rump of the fall season at Kingsmill.

August — Our most faithful reporters, Grace and Joe Doyle hiked Camp Peary three times in August. This is a composite report. There were 53 species Aug. 5 and 52 Aug. 19. Great Egret, Little Blue Heron, Green-backed Heron, Mute Swan, Osprey, Wild Turkey, Killdeer, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Wood Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Brown Thrasher, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Summer

Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow and Orchard Oriole.

There were also some reports on the e-mail Va-Bird List that seemed of interest here:

Aug. 19 — Larry Lybch reports 209 Caspian Terns at Hog Island.

Aug. 20 — A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was spotted at the Mackay Island Wildlife Refuge on Knott's Island. It was a juvenile with a short tail and still had some downey feathers visible on its lower back. Reporter David Clark says, "My guess is that it grew up somewhere not too far away."

Aug. 21 — Marshall Iliff got a very good view of the Curlew Sandpiper that was reported at Chincoteague, and for good measure, spotted a Lark Sparrow there.

Aug. 18 — At the Navy Base near Virginia Beach, Karen Beatty watched a Piping Plover for fifteen minutes from as close as 30 feet away. In the same area there were: Whimbrel, Willet and Ruddy Turnstone.

There was also a lot of discussion on the network about Chimney Swifts and their late August—first part of September gatherings in flocks for migration. During this time they make a very dramatic funnel pattern as they hover over a chimney at dusk and drop one by one into the chimney to spend the night. Does anyone know of a chimney where we could watch this intriguing sight? There are lots of Chimney Swifts around Colonial Williamsburg and we wonder if they drop into any of the chimneys in that area. Call Bill Holcombe at 229-8057 if you know of a chimney that they use.

PEREGRINE FALCON MIGRATION

Taken from a report on the Va-Bird e-mail site by Wallace Coffey of Bristol, Tenn. describing a conversation with Dr. Mitchell Byrd.

Dr. Byrd told me that their focus on Peregrine Falcons this year would be moving birds from some of the coastal sites to areas on national park lands in the Virginia Blue Ridge and in the Shenandoah Valley. He said that some of the efforts of the Peregrines to nest on coastal structures were not successful so it seemed best to work at trying to start mountain populations.

The birds are outfitted with solar powered transmitters that send signals to a satellite which permits tracking their movements. As these transmitters weigh only two to three percent of the bird's weight they do not interfere with movement. The birds came to Harper's Ferry on June 8 from the Hart-Miller Lighthouse in the Chesapeake Bay.

John Trapp with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has provided a couple of excellent maps that are being drawn by the satellite tracking program on two web sites which will be kept up for three years. The first website tracks the more far ranging birds such as a female that has been traveling about 500 miles a week and is now in Rhode Island. The second site tracks the birds in the Shenandoah National Park and includes pictures of them.

Site 1 is

<<http://www.nps.gov/hafe/falcons/map.htm>

Site 2 is <<http://www.dom.com/about/environment/falcon/tracker1.html>

AUTUMN ADVENTURE 2001

On Saturday, October 13 a consortium of Williamsburg area environmental and conservation organizations will host *Autumn Adventure 2001*. This event, taking place from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at James City County's Greensprings Trail behind Jamestown High School, is an educational program open and free to the public. It provides ten to fifteen displays highlighting the critical natural resources of the Powhatan Creek watershed and demonstrates the importance of conservation to protect these resources.

Organizing partners for this event are the Williamsburg Land Conservancy, Friends of Powhatan Creek Watershed, The Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District, James City County 4-H and James City County Parks and Recreation.