



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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## NEXT MEETING

Next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will be on Wednesday, April 17 at 7:30 in Room 117 of Millington Hall, William & Mary. Ruth Beck will do one of her famous spring warbler identification workshops. With a little help from friends, Ruth will lead you through videos, CD-ROMS, audio tapes and other instructional aids in an attempt to get everyone up to speed for the migration. The migration is already underway and reports have been received from club members of Yellow-throated Warblers, Black and White Warblers, Northern Parulas and Louisiana Waterthrushes. Don't miss this one!

## One Minute Lesson: COMMON BIRD SONGS

American Robin: "*cheerily, cheer-up, cheerily*"

Carolina Chickadee: "*chick-a-dee-dee-dee*"  
"*fee-bee-bee-bay*"

Carolina Wren: "*teakettle-teakettle-teakettle*"

Tufted Titmouse: "*chiva, chiva, chiva*"  
"*peter, peter, peter*"

Eastern Bluebird: "*cur-wee*"

White-throated Sparrow: "*old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody*"

Red-bellied Woodpecker: "*churr churr churr*"

Red-headed Woodpecker: "*queer queer*"

Northern Flicker: "*wick, wick, wick*"

Rufous-sided Towhee: "*drink your teeeee*"  
"*tow-wheeee*"

Barred Owl: "*who cooks for you, who cooks for you, (all)*"

Great-horned Owl: "who who who whoo-who who who whoo"

And here are a couple to start listening for:

Red-eyed Vireo: "*here I am, where are you?*"

White-eyed Vireo: "*chick-per-a weeo-chic*"

Oven Bird: "teacher, teacher, teacher!"

## MARCHFIELD TRIP

On a soft gray morning, March 30, preceding Easter Sunday, Randy Coleman led a bird walk around his neighborhood, the Vineyards. Winter ducks had dwindled to a trio of Mallards, but a Phoebe perched above the pond, and a Pied-billed Grebe appeared just as the birders were departing.

A special highlight was a Red-shouldered Hawk sitting on a nest among thick vegetation. Brown Thrashers, Rufous-sided Towhees and Song Sparrows were vocal, as was a Pileated Woodpecker. Robins and Bluebirds were plentiful and a White-throated Sparrow was seen near a feeder. In all, 32 species were identified.

Enjoying this very pleasant morning were fourteen birders with Randy Coleman leading: Ellen Bombalski, Bill & Betty Ann Caldwell, Shirley Devan, Carol and Dave Goff, Al and Uleg Karb, Richard Mays, Chuck Rend, Linda Sherer, Herb and Bev Spannuth and Marilyn Zeigler.

## DISMAL SWAMP WARBLERS GOAL OF APRIL 20 FIELD TRIP

We visited the great Dismal swamp last year on the third Saturday in April and came away with a count of 51 species, including 13 warblers, two vireos and a lot of very neat birds. The special find that day was a Swainson's Warbler centered

in a scope, singing its heart out! Birding success can be very elusive but the Dismal Swamp at this time of year always offers the possibility of a great day of birding.

Alex Minarik, who helped to find that Swainson last year and got it focused in the scope, will lead this trip, her fifth to the Great Dismal Swamp.

As the drive to the swamp takes a bit more than an hour, an early start is essential. We will meet in front of Wild Birds Unlimited to consolidate cars and be on our way by 6:00. Mosquitoes can be a problem but are not always so. Nevertheless, long sleeved shirts and pants plus hats and repellent are advised. You will also need a lunch and something to drink. These items can be left in the cars. We will walk several miles so comfortable shoes are a must. We should be back by 2 to 2:30.

## FIELD NOTES FOR MARCH

March 3 Alex Minarik walked the five-mile loop on Jamestown Island with her faithful lab and saw several Fox Sparrows, “lots of Red-headed Woodpeckers” and heard many Brown-headed Nuthatches and Pine Warblers. There was a group of twenty Wild Turkeys on Centerville Road near Route 5. Two males with fanned out tails were “strutting their stuff.” “And the Northern Oriole was still on my suet log March 1.”

March 16 Tom Armour found some returning Royal Terns and Laughing Gulls at the Kingsmill Marina.

March 19 Tom reports two Cooper’s hawks in Kingsmill and a Wild Turkey flying across the road on 199 near Henry Street. John McDowell also reported a Wild Turkey in that same area..

March 22 Bill Snyder sees two Wild Turkeys in his yard near Powhatan Creek.

March 23 While checking the Bluebird Trail at York River State Park, Tony Dion saw a pair of Osprey on the nesting perch in the York River behind the visitor’s center.

March 24 Joe Doyle sees three Yellow-throated Warblers and a Wood Pewee at Camp Peary.

March 24 Shirley Devan had a good walk at Jamestown Island that turned up a Great Horned Owl and five Red-headed Woodpeckers.

March 25 Alex Minarik finds two Yellow-

throated Warblers and a Louisiana Waterthrush at Jamestown Island.

March 26 Shirley Devan had a Ruby-crowned Kinglet hanging around her feeder for about a week. Also says that the Juncos are still there.

March 27 Julie Hotchkiss says that this is the first year that Brown Pelicans have come up the James River past First Colony, “and they only seem to be up this way on dark, cloudy days!”

April 2 Alex Minarik found Purple Martins on a pond in Ford’s Colony and on the next day had a Northern Parula in her yard, heard an Ovenbird singing on Jolly Pond Road and saw a Greater Yellowlegs in Drummond Field.

April 4 A report from Julie Hotchkiss who was watching the James River: She found fifty Ruddy Ducks in close to the bank, a flight of fifty Bonaparte’s Gulls headed up the river and large numbers of Cormorants streaming up river.

**Month of March:** Two full time banders have been at work since March 4 on the Eastern Shore at the Virginia National Wild Life Refuge. By the end of the month they had banded about a thousand songbirds, mostly Yellow rumps, but in early April the first Indigo Buntings and Prairie Warblers entered the nets.

Grace and Joe Doyle’s composite of four Sundays of birding Camp Peary was: Brown Pelican, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey, Killdeer, Belted Kingfisher, **Eastern Wood Pewee** (first of the year), **Yellow-throated Warbler** (first for the year), Pine Warbler, Rufous-sided Towhee, Eastern Meadowlark.

Brian Taber’s Hawk Watch Station at College Creek on the James had tabulated 520 hawks by the end of March. Ten species were represented: Black Vulture, Turkey Vultures, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Cooper’s Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrel. Migrating water fowl have been joining these north bound hawks.

Shirley Devan reports that as of March 31 the York River State Park Blue Bird Trail had two complete Bluebird nests and one complete

Chickadee nest, plus three nests in process. This is slightly behind last years nesting progress.

## **SPRING REPORTS FROM THE VIRGINIA BIRD LINE**

March 11 Yellow-throated and Black and White Warblers in Chesapeake.

March 26 Bullocks Oriole in Vienna, feeding on hulled sunflower seed. Still there at the end of the month with many pictures taken. This will likely be the first confirmed report of this species in Virginia.

March 17 Ned Brinkley reports hearing a Pacific Loon Calling at Cape Charles beach.

March 21 Purple Martins and Barn Swallows in Prince William County.

March 23 Yellow-throated Warblers in Richmond.

March 25 Vesper Sparrows in Haymarket.

March 29 Orange-crowned Warbler in Richmond.

March 30 Louisiana Waterthrush in Jeffersonston.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in Occuqan. Blue-headed Vireo and Louisiana Waterthrush in Prince William County. Palm Warbler in Richmond Riverbend Park

March 31 Red-crossbills in Manassas Park

## **WOOD DUCK STORY FROM JULIE HOTCHKISS**

*(This neat story fits the season very well. Ed.)*

A few years ago when she lived on Lake Pasbeheg Julie set out a Wood Duck nesting box, as Wood Ducks had been on the lake the previous year. After a bit of a wait a pair of Wood Ducks took an interest in the house. Then, after a few days of sitting on it and hanging around in the vicinity, Julie felt certain that the hen was sitting on eggs.

Soon thereafter she noticed a bunch of feathers scattered about the box, with some sticking to it. When she went to investigate she found a black snake in the box. She quickly got a wire, hooked it around the snake and with the help of her

husband, Ty, pulled it out of the box. They could see a bulge where the snake had eaten one egg but there appeared to be roughly a dozen left. Having nothing against black snakes except this one's feeding spot, they exiled the snake to the west side of the Chickahominy.

Then they were concerned whether or not the hen would return. Next day she came and sat on the house but left. After doing this several times she was finally seen entering the box.

They kept close watch on things after that and one day Julie saw the mama come out onto the lake and sit chirping at her brood. They soon came tumbling out of the box and after she had gathered the eleven chicks around her the mama paddled off into the lake. Julie looked into the box and saw one chick still sitting there. She gently lifted it out and set it on the water, where it began a shrill peeping. The mother soon heard this and paddled back. When the chick saw them approaching it skittered across the water and joined the brood. Again mama paddled off, now with the entire brood of twelve!

## **FORE! BIRDERS TO FORAY ON GOLF COURSES**

Golf course development is progressing at the rate of one course per day – there are already 300 in Virginia alone. As more and more acres of forest are cleared, a serious question is raised: How will this affect bird populations? The answer is that nobody really knows. A few studies in the mid-west have looked at bird life on single golf courses, but to understand the large scale impact, we must broaden our scope. The Annual Virginia Society of Ornithologists' Foray, June 1 – 15, 2002 will examine golf courses across the Commonwealth to establish the first baseline numbers on bird use of the golf courses.

A statewide bird census of golf courses will be no small undertaking. To get an accurate picture of bird use of golf courses we must survey as many courses as possible, and for this we need volunteers. If you live near a golf course, and chances are that you do, please consider participating in this endeavor. We are looking for pairs of birders to walk single courses on two mornings, or to get a golf cart and drive it all one morning during the

census period. We'll get permission and supply census sheets. You just need to provide the eyes and ears!

Each party will be supplied with a map of the course, a checklist of birds, and a questionnaire to evaluate habitat characteristics of the gold course and your coverage. We have a letter of introduction for each course from the national golfing trade group, the USGA, specifically asking course managers to cooperate with our efforts. ALL courses must be contacted prior to the Foray to ensure that birders have permission to be there. This means that the sooner that we hear from you, the better, as we need to work out the logistics.

We have the opportunity to make a big contribution to bird conservation in Virginia and indeed in the whole developed world. For better or worse, golf courses are changing the face of our planet and the 2002 Golf Course Foray is the first step in understanding how birds will be affected. If you are interested in participating, please contact us by e-mail at [dacris@wm.edu](mailto:dacris@wm.edu) or phone at (757) 221-2405. If you have courses you are interested in covering, let us know which ones and when in the first two weeks of June you might be able to cover them. If you have no particular course that you are familiar with but want to participate, let us know what part of the state you want to work in and we will set you up. Please include a mailing address with your correspondence so that we can send you a foray packet. Fore!

By Dan Cristol and Josh LeClerc

## **BIRD CLUB PICNIC, JUNE 1**

Ruth and Sherwin Beck have the perfect location for a June picnic and they have again invited the Bird Club to come spend an afternoon of some birding, some great eating and some very pleasant hanging around with other birders. The Beck property, located on the edge of a pretty lake in deep woods near Barhamsville, is the ideal setting for this annual event. All participants bring something good to eat to be shared with all. Jean Armour is the contact person who keeps the numbers of salads, side dishes and deserts in balance to go with the roast turkey breast supplied by the club. The result is a feast that proves that

Birders like to eat, like to cook, and are happy to share the goodies. You can reach Jean at 229-2363 and she will provide any needed guidance.

At 4:30 there will be a short bird walk in the area and at 5:30 the feasting begins.

Directions: Take I-64 west to exit #227, Route 30 going toward West Point. About three miles down this road you will come to Barhamsville. Look for the fire house on your right and immediately look for a secondary paved road to your right, Rt 273. Follow this for two miles. As the forested area to your right gives way to open fields you will see a gravel road to your right with a sign pointing to a hunt club down that road. Follow that road past the hunt club and you will find your self on the lane to the Beck home.

## **SPRING BIRD COUNT**

Brian Taber has set Sunday, May 5 for the Spring Bird Count. This is a great opportunity to get out into the midst of the migrating bird season and see what interesting things can turn up. Last year the 29 participants identified 149 species, including 24 warblers and vireos, plus tanagers, grosbeaks, orioles, thrushes and some winter birds that were still hanging around. If you would like to participate there are nine territories covered starting at about 7 a.m. and continuing until about 3:30. Each territory has a leader. Togo, call that leader and arrange the place and time of meeting.

Hugh Beard (221-0499) covers the Mid-Plantation section, southwest section along the James River

Ruth Beck (566-8234) covers College Woods and adjacent areas.

Bettye Fields (220-2692) covers Skimino, northwest along the York River.

Paul McAllister, (229-1323) covers Kingsmill and adjacent areas.

Lee Schuster (565-3252) covers Jolly Pond and adjacent areas.

Dot Silsby (596-3252) covers Jamestown Island and adjacent areas.

Brian Taber (253-1181) covers Hog Island.

Bill Williams (229-6095) covers Cheatham Annex The ninth area, Camp Peary, is not open to volunteers.

## **COURT VICTORY FOR CASPIAN TERNS**

On March 30, in what conservationists are hailing as a victory for birds and sound science, a settlement was reached in the suit brought by the National Audubon Society, the Defenders of Wild-life, the American Bird Conservancy and the Seattle Audubon Society against the Army Corp of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The issue involved was created when the United States Fish and Wildlife Service issued a permit to the Engineer Corps to remove 18,000 Caspian terns from islands in the Columbia River estuary. This tern colony once numbered 20,000 and represented 30% of the Caspian tern population of North America. Action by the Corps had already destroyed most of the colony on one of the major islands, forcing the birds to move farther out into the estuary. The Fish and Wildlife Service had taken the position that the terns, which do feed on the small salmon, were responsible for the reduction in wild salmon. However, a Federal District Court judge ruled in August 2001 that there was almost no information provided by the Federal Agencies as to whether reducing the tern population would, in fact, affect the number of salmon returning to the estuary.

There are two major parts to the settlement. The Corps will develop an Environmental Impact Statement concerning the terns' impact upon the salmon migration and return to the court with it before taking any further action against the terns. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has agreed to take steps to ensure satisfactory alternative nesting sites for the terns. The plaintiffs in the case feel that spreading the tern population to smaller man-made islands in the estuary will actually improve the health of the colony and protect against catastrophes which could affect the more concentrated population.

"Caspian Terns were made the convenient scape-goats for the decline of Columbia River salmon, simply because they eat juvenile salmonids, over 90% of which are hatchery reared," said Gerald Winegrad, Vice President for Policy of American Bird Conservancy. "A scientifically rigorous Environmental Impact Study is needed, as there is no sound evidence that terns are in any way

responsible for salmon declines."

*(From a release from the Audubon Society.)*