

THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 26, Number 10

November 2002

NEXT MEETING

The Williamsburg Bird Club will meet next on Nov. 20 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117, Millington Hall on the campus of William and Mary. Dan Cristol has scheduled a special treat with ornithological legend Mitchell Byrd coming to talk to the Club about Peregrine Falcons in Virginia. He will update us on their ongoing recovery and tell us more about the high-tech efforts to learn more about the amazing travels that these birds engage in. A live demonstration of the Center for Conservation Biology's on-line peregrine information site, "Falcon Trak," will be included.

Also, Ruth Beck asks everyone to come prepared to say what his or her favorite bird is and why!

E. SHORE OCTOBER FIELD TRIP

A strong southwest wind made this a poor day to be looking for birds in this paradise of fall birding. Even the hawk watching was virtually closed down by the conditions, although the banders did manage to produce a Cooper's and a Sharp-shinned for all to see. The best bird of the day was a Winter Wren on Island Four. It may also have been confused by the conditions — this quick-to-hide little bird performed in the open within six feet of us, giving all great views of a normally stealthy bird. Participants under Tom Armour's leadership included Jeanne Armour, a very happy yellow lab named Elsa Armour, Carolyn Lowe and Alex Minarik. The weather was fine except for that persistent wind and the group saw a total of 41 species.

NOVEMBER WILL FEATURE A YORK RIVER FIELD TRIP

Tom Armour will lead the November field trip along the York River on November 23. You can see from the Doyle's reports at Camp Peary that water fowl have returned to the York in good numbers and should offer some good birding. The water fowl on the river are not as time-sensitive as some of the birds that we usually go looking for so Tom has scheduled a more leisurely start. We'll gather in front of Wild Birds Unlimited in the Monticello Shopping Center at 8:00 a.m.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 12/15

The 103rd Christmas Bird will again draw birders into the field all over the United States, Canada and some foreign countries, plus a very special territory assigned to a scientific supply ship in the Antarctic Ocean. The Williamsburg Bird Club will cover its assigned territory from daybreak until about 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, December 15. While the hard core of about 26 regulars have been showing up for many years we always hope to find more members who will become addicted to this annual effort. Its purpose is to supply population figures to scientists who study the distribution and population health of our birds. And those regulars could not imagine *not* being in the field for the Christmas count, barring pneumonia or a serious family problem. The weather is often bracing. The bird mix includes migrants that have been slow to head south, winter residents, the year 'rounders and those strange passers through that frequently show up on this count.

Our territory is an area with a 15-mile radius

surrounding the C.W. Visitor Center. It's divided into nine sectors, each with a leader. If you would like to participate, pick a sector that appeals to you and call the leader to arrange a time and place of meeting. You don't have to commit to the entire day, but if you do, bring a lunch and beverage and dress warmly in layers. You will be moving around by car so you will have a place to leave things.

Here are the leaders, their territories and a rough identification of that territory:

Tom Armour — Camp Peary, which is closed to all but Tom and the Doyles.

Hugh Beard — Middle Plantation, roughly the James River to Waller Mill Park and Governor's Land to the south boundary of First Colony. Phone 221-0499.

Ruth Beck — College Woods, which includes the William and Mary campus and parts of Colonial Williamsburg. Phone is 566-8234.

Bettye Fields — Skimino Territory which is north of Route 64 and runs east from about the York River State Park to the Camp Peary boundary. Phone is 220-2692.

Paul McAllister — Kingsmill, including that subdivision and the country road to it from Carter's Grove. Phone is 229-1323.

Lee Schuster — Jolly Pond, including the pond and other sites off Jolly Pond Road. Phone 565-6148.

Dot Silsby — Jamestown Island, including some other nearby assigned territories. Phone is 596-3252.

Brian Taber — Hog Island including the ferry trip to and from the south shore of the James. Phone is 253-1181.

Bill Williams — The Cheatham Annex Naval base plus some adjacent territory. Phone is 229-6095.

Do yourself a favor and take part in an event so central to birding in the United States.

FIELD NOTES FOR OCTOBER

While we did not get a huge number of reports, those that we did get provided an excellent snapshot of the incoming fall population change.

October 5 – Grace and Joe Doyle report a bunch of fall arrivals found at Camp Peary: **Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler**, and **White-throated Sparrow**. They also find a **Northern Harrier** and **Palm Warblers**.

October 6 – Tom Armour finds an **Eastern Phoebe** in his yard and the next day finds a **Yellow-rumped Warbler**. The following day he finds his first **Ruddy Ducks** of the season on the James River accompanied by some **Royal Terns**, still hanging around, some **Foster's Terns** and a variety of gulls. Ruth Beck reports the last sighting of her **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** (even though she left her feeders out until the end of the month).

October 9 – Tom Armour sees “a nice male **Northern Parula**” in the yard.

October 13 – The Doyles make the first report of a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Camp Peary. They also have a **Pine Warbler** and more **White-throated Sparrows**.

October 14 – Tom Armour reports his first **Coot** of the season at the Kingsmill Marina.

October 17 – Ruth Beck finds her first **White-throated Sparrows**.

October 20 – Doyles find a **Common Tern** and an **Eastern Wood-Pewee** still hanging around and spot two more **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers**.

October 24 – First **Pied-billed Grebe** shows up on Ruth Beck's pond.

October 25 – Three **Red-breasted Nuthatches** appear in Ruth Beck's yard and stay around for three days.

October 26 – Alex Minarik reports “several arrivals to my yard and neighborhood: **Yellow-bellied sapsucker, white-throated sparrow** and both **ruby and golden-crowned kinglets**.”

October 27 – Bill Williams has another good day on the green Spring Nature Trail. But on his way there at the baseball field he finds a **White-crowned Sparrow** and a **Vesper Sparrow** mixed in a flock of **Eastern Bluebirds, Chipping Sparrows, House Finches** and a **Pine Warbler**. Just proves the value of taking a closer look at those flocks of common birds. On the trail he found an early **Junco**, a **Brown-headed Nuthatch**

and two **Cooper's Hawks** along with the usual birds found there.

October 29 – Ruth Beck reports that “we’ve been watching an adult **Bald Eagle** that has been fishing the pond for about 30 minutes each time for the last three days.” Also, “an **Osprey** is still hanging on and foraging for fish.”

October 31 – Tom Armour sees his season’s first **Bonaparte’s Gulls** feeding in the James over a bunch of Rockfish. **Royal Terns** and **Foster’s Terns** are still there with the usual gulls.

November 3 – (Lets not get rigid when we are reporting on the fall arrivals!) The Doyles report their first **Tundra Swans** on the Camp Peary Beaver Pond. Also saw their first **Dark-eyed Juncos** and found **Ring-necked Ducks** and **Buffleheads** on the York River. They report that the raft of **Ruddy Ducks** has spread out along the river. Also saw **Ring-necked Ducks** in Kingsmill.

FROM AROUND VIRGINIA VIA BIRD-LINK.

10/6- 10/10 – The banding nets caught 16 migrating warblers presumably south-bound and a collection of fall arrivals: Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

10/12 – A Loggerhead Shrike in Sky Meadow State Park.

10/12 – Two White Pelicans at Belle Haven, Fairfax Cty.

10/14 – Frigate Bird (most likely a Magnificent Frigate Bird) was spotted over a hawk watch in Delaware and then off of the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

10/15 – A good day on the CBBT: Island 2 , two oystercatchers and three Winter Wrens. On Island 3 there were a Sedge Wren, a Hermit Thrush, a Chat and a Meadowlark, and on Island 42 Salt-marsh Sharptailed Sparrows and a Seaside Sparrow.

10/19 – A Selasphorus Hummingbird in Rockingham Cty.

10/19 – On the CBBT a Clay Colored Sparrow and a Junco plus Eurasian Colored Doves at the intersection of Routes 600 and 645 near Kiptopeke.

10/20 – Juncos in Springfield.

10/20 – Late Ruby-throated Hummingbird in Manassas.

10/20 –At Sky Meadow State Park: Loggerhead Shrike, Lincoln’s Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Bobolink, Winter Wren, Grasshopper Sparrow, Blue-headed Vireo, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Brown Creeper.

10/21 – A Hermit Thrush in Staunton.

10/21 – A Western King Bird just north of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Wildlife Refuge.

10/21 – At the Augusta County Medical Center a collection of sparrows: 13 Chipping, 8 Field, 52 Savannah, 27 Song, 4 Lincoln, 5 Swamp, 42 White-throated and 17 White-crowned, plus 6 Juncos.

10/24 – Banded seven Saw-whet Owls in Rockingham County.

10/26 – Still have a Ruby-throated Hummingbird at a feeder in Vienna.

10/26 – Four Purple Finches in Fairfax Cty.

10/26 – Another Selasphorus Hummingbird in Grottoes.

10/27 – 150 White-crowned Sparrows in the Stuart’s Draft area with 25 of them at the Sewage treatment Center.

10/26 – Two Ross’s Geese seen in a flock of Snow Geese at Chincoteague.

10/28 – 24 Tundra Swans flying over Winchester.

10/29 – 14 Tundra swans on Silver lake in Rockingham Cty.

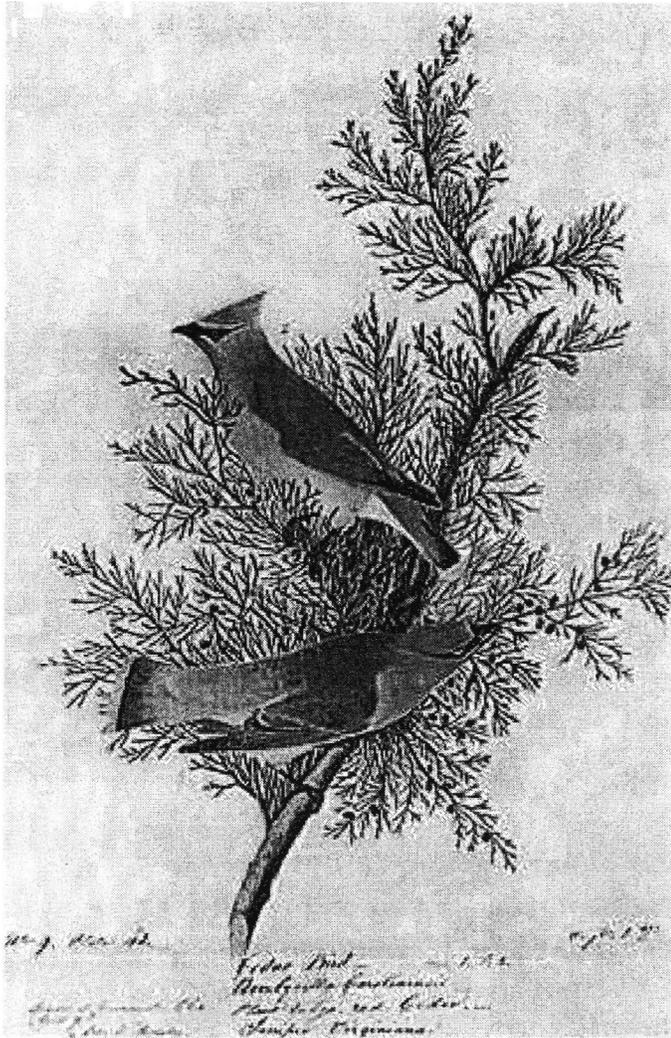
10/29 – 75 Tundra swans overhead in Prince William County.

10/29 – Overhead at Kiptopeke: Two Golden Eagles, Tundra Swans, Snow Geese and Loons.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Cedar Waxwing by Bill Holcombe

We don’t always have room for this feature but Ruth Beck’s request for favorite birds brought several to mind, including this gorgeous specimen. It never completely disappears from our area but larger numbers seem to return in the fall. So it seemed like a good time to pay some attention to it. And, Ruth, while this may not be my all time favorite, it is certainly high on the list.



First of all, it is an absolutely beautiful creature. About the size of a Titmouse, its overall soft, silky, tan-gray or fawn color is brilliantly offset by the bright yellow strip across the tail bottom, by the bright red color on the wing tips and the black bill flowing into a black eye mask. This brilliant appearance is capped by a rather long, soft crest. The “waxwing” name comes from the bright red, drop shaped, wax-like material that forms on the tips of an adult’s secondary wing feathers. These waxy droplets are formed on the end of the feather shaft and their function is unknown. The bird’s fondness for eating cedar berries (as well as many other kinds of berries) completes the name.

But this bird also has appealing behavior characteristics. Most commonly it flies in small groups (10 to 20) that stay compactly together and have quick, strong flight patterns that drop the group quickly into berry bearing trees or bushes or into small leafless trees where they form attractive

silhouettes. Just as quickly the group is off in another direction. They project the appearance of being an energetic, happy group. They are not shy of people so that a birder can usually get good looks at them while they are stripping berries or resting in a tree top.

The waxwing family contains three species in the northern hemisphere, two of them in North America. The other waxwing, the Bohemian, normally stays several hundred miles north and west of us. At infrequent and irregular intervals the Bohemian invades large patches of the U.S. where it is not normally seen. The waxwing’s relationship to other birds is obscure and apparently they belonged to a larger family of birds formed at much earlier times but the Cedar Waxwings close relatives have, at some point in the past, vanished. Both species tend to be nomadic without strong territorial preferences and may not always even nest in the same areas. Sometimes they stay and nest in what is more normally their wintering ground.

Cedar Waxwings nest in a broad territory extending across Canada from Alaska to Newfoundland and south through the U.S. as far as northern Alabama and Georgia, with much local variation in specific areas. They winter farther south to the Gulf Coast and casually to Panama, South America and the West Indies.

Another attractive behavior of these birds is that a pair or a group can sit on a branch and pass a berry back and forth among the group until one eats it. The same behavior is part of the courtship rituals when a pair may pass fruit, flower petals or insects back and forth.

Nests are built in both deciduous and coniferous forests and in orchards 6 to 50 feet above the ground. Sometimes they nest in colonies of up to a dozen nests in the same group of trees. Nests are built of twigs, dry grass, moss, pine needles and wool. Sometimes the materials are taken from other bird’s nests and some waxwings have been reported tame enough to take short pieces of string and yarn from human hands at nesting time. Three to six eggs are laid between June and September and two broods a season are sometimes raised. Eggs are incubated by the female for 12 to 16 days and the young leave the nest 14 to 18 days later.

Besides eating many kinds of berries this bird also feeds on maple tree sap, flower petals of apple and pecan trees, and insects such as beetles, weevils, carpenter ants, cicadas, caterpillars and canker-worms. The very young birds are fed insects but within a few days the adults bring berries which they carry in their throats.

Records have been kept showing that these birds can live 7-1/2 to 8 years.

There is only one negative that I can think of about this beautiful bird with such interesting characteristics. If your car has ever been parked under a tree when a flock of waxwings comes to rest after feeding on berries, you will also see what a job they can do splattering up the car.

Pyracantha, mountain ash and mulberry tree plants can attract these birds to your yard but these nomads may turn up almost anywhere in our area.

Reference: The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds by John Terres

AN ALERT FROM VA-BIRD

Congress is planning on voting next month on whether or not the Defense Department should be completely exempt from the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and thus be allowed to kill any birds any time. From what I have read, they have provided little justification for this. They can already seek exemption if they need to for certain operations at certain times in certain places. This action flies in the face of a treaty that involves not only the U.S., but Canada, Mexico and Russia as well. This will place the DOD totally above the law as far as the MBTA goes. You may use this link in order to urge Congress to vote "No" to the DOD's request:

<<http://takeaction.worldwildlife.org/action.asp/step=2&item=2244>>

Michael Shapiro, Richmond, Henrico County

BIRDING THE OUTER BANKS IN FIRST WEEK OF NOVEMBER

Wind was a problem the first few days but when it stopped the mosquitoes took over. Nevertheless, there were some nice birds. On the beach were Black-bellied Plovers, Sanderling, Willets,

Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls. Patrolling the surf were numerous Royal Terns, Common Terns and a single Least Tern. Brown Pelicans were smashing into the ocean a bit farther out. At the Pea Island Refuge the first group of twelve Snow Geese had just arrived along with a single Shoveler Duck, a Green-winged Teal, and a Northern Pintail. Shore birds included 15 Avocet, a Marbled Godwit, a Tri-colored Heron, a Little Blue Heron, Semipalmated Plover, Semipalmated Sandpipers and a small group of Dowitchers that I labeled "Long-billed" because of the grotesquely long bills (yes, I know that the book says not to use length of bill as a factor).

SLATE OF OFFICERS FOR 2003

Our Nominating Committee, Julie Hotchkiss and Marilyn Zeigler, will introduce the following slate of officers for election at the November meeting:

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|------------------------|---------------|
| President | Ruth Beck |
| Secretary | Alex Minarik |
| Treasurer | Charles Rend |
| V.P. & Program Chair | Tom McCary |
| V.P. & Co-Editor Flyer | Phil Young |
| V.P. & Co-Editor Flyer | Bill Holcombe |
| Field Trip Coordinator | Tom Armour |
| Member at Large | Lee Schuster |