



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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## NEXT MEETING

The Williamsburg Bird Club will resume meeting on the third Wednesday of each month starting September 17. The meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 Millington Hall on the campus of William and Mary. A typo in the June-July *Flyer* referred to that date as September 27. The meeting program will be listed in the September *Flyer*.

## RUTH BECK TAKES US TO CRANEY ISLAND AUGUST 23

Ruth says the flow of shore birds south has already started and August 23 should be a good time for our visit. At 7 a.m. we will meet at the Colonial Shopping Center parking lot on Jamestown Road up from The Fresh Market to consolidate cars and leave as soon as that is done.

On a recent visit Ruth found all of the terns except Roseate and Sooty, most of the peeps including White-rumped, plus Yellowlegs and Stilt, Pectoral and Spotted Sandpipers. Come along and get a good start on the fall season. A hat, long sleeves and long pants plus bug spray are recommended in case the breeze stops and the mosquitoes emerge. You will also need a lunch and something to drink.

## CLEANING HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS

Most of us know that we are supposed to keep our hummingbird feeders clean and to dump out the fluid if it gets milky or marred with a white filmy substance. That is because the black substance that builds up on the feeding spouts, in the bottle and in the base are signs of harmful bacteria. The

milky look indicates unhealthy chemical reaction to the heat of the sun.

However, the cleaning can be difficult and it's easy to put it off until "the next time." Ruth

Beck recently found a bottle cleaning brush made for cleaning those feeders at Wild Birds Unlimited that simplifies the job quite a bit. She cleans her eight feeders after every other filling but her feeders are emptied every 24 hours by the very large population that she enjoys. A rule of thumb printed in the web site, [<birdsinc.com>](http://birdsinc.com), suggests half filling your feeder and cleaning it every four days.

The only thing that you can safely add to warm water when you are doing the cleaning is vinegar and then you must be sure to rinse very thoroughly. The Wild Birds brush has a small end that will fit into the narrow necked bottle that most of us are using. I also discovered from Ruth that the plastic piece that the bottle threads into can be pulled out to make the cleaning easier.

At any rate my conversation with Ruth gave me a clearer picture of what I should be doing and how to do it, and I thought others might also find this helpful.

## HERE IS A REAL HUMMINGBIRD ENTHUSIAST

*(From the Virginia Bird Listserve by Dave White of Zion Crossroads)*

At all times, we have had eight hummingbirds around our feeders on the deck since early June. Well, they have nested and fledged young and tonight we counted a certain 19 birds. The juveniles are fairly easy to tell with their juvenile plumage and short bills. Amazingly they all get along pretty well. They all chase each other but it seems to be some form of tag. There is one male who seems to dominate the crowd, but it is too much for him to keep up with and all the rest just ignore him or try to get him to play. We have an eight ounce window feeder, a 16 ounce hanging feeder and a 32 ounce hanger and they all have to be filled daily. The 16 ounce is flying saucer shaped and has eight lowers on it. A lot of the time all of the perches are filled and a couple of birds are on

the hanging rod waiting to get on. We planted a three stem River Birch off the corner of the deck by this feeder this spring and it's not unusual to see five or six birds perched in it. Tonight my son had a soda straw in his mouth with some red salvia flower petals stuck in the other end and several birds tried to get nectar out of the flowers while the other end was in his mouth. A couple of birds landed on the straw. Getting within a foot of them seems to push their comfort zone.

I'm not sure what size territory hummingbirds have and I couldn't track any of the birds' flights to nests. It was just too confusing. But they seem to share this eat out restaurant space very well. It gets pretty wild and buzz-bomby out on the deck when the performers are drinking all the sugar water that they want all day long so I shouldn't be surprised. Dave White

## **CLUB MEMBERS CONTRIBUTE TO RECENT VSO PUBLICATION**

Four times a year the Virginia Society of Ornithology publishes a journal of papers submitted by members dealing with ornithology subjects in the commonwealth. When the Fall issue came out recently I noticed that our club members participated in writing three of these and Bryan Watts of William and Mary's Center for Conservation Biology, and a familiar speaker at Club meetings, co-authored a fourth.

Brian Taber and Bill Williams along with Edward Brinkley of Cape Charles and Michael Stinson of Dillwyn, Va. authored a report of the unusual bird sightings associated with the high hurricane years of 1995, 1996, 1998 and 1999. The article reviews the history of hurricanes driving sea birds and coastal birds into inland Virginia starting as far back as 1842. Against this history the authors collect and present verified records of unusual birds driven into Virginia by the storms named Bertha, Fran, Josephine, Bonnies, Dennis and Floyd occurring from 1996 to 1999. (The destruction of Hugo in 1989 made any such effort impossible.) An example of this work is the report of the unusual birds found in the Williamsburg area September 5, 1999, associated with hurricane Dennis. The list includes Glossy Ibis, American Golden Plovers, American Avocet, Hudsonian Godwit, Sanderlings, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalaropes and Black Terns.

Bill Williams, Michael Beck, and Ruth Beck along with Bill Akers and Jerry Via co-authored a paper on their annual Survey of Beach-nesting and Colonial Birds of the Virginia Barrier

Islands, 2000. This was the 26<sup>th</sup> year for this survey that has traced the rise and fall of the numbers and species of nesting birds on the barrier islands. While almost every year there are some species showing population improvements, sadly, the overall trend is clearly downward with some notable exceptions such as the Brown Pelican.

Brian Taber authored a paper on a Spring Record of Swainson's Hawk in Virginia. Brian describes his observation of a Swainson's Hawk crossing the James River and flying over the Hawk Watch Station that he maintains near College Creek.

Bryan Watt's piece written with Stephen Rottenborn concerns breeding habits of the Northern Harriers in Coastal Virginia. It describes observations of the summer population of Northern Harriers along the western shore of Chesapeake Bay and along the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Their work was more extensive than previous reports and while supporting the concept that nesting harriers are sparsely scattered along coastal Virginia, their actual count of nests was considerably higher than previously described.

## **MORE BLUEBIRDS FLEDGED AT YRST**

With a late July report Shirley Devan continues to let us all share vicariously in the success of the Club's Bluebird Nesting Box Trail at York River State Park.

8 complete nests:

15 eggs

10 chicks

24 fledged Chickadees

43 fledged Bluebirds

There were also four 14-day old chicks that were fully feathered and about to fledge and which we assume by now are flying all over YRST.

However, there is bad news to go with the good as a group of five nestlings that seemed to be doing very well the week before were gone and presumably taken by a predator.

The bluebirds at YRST owe their good start in life to the efforts of Shirley and her dedicated group of Chris and Tony Dion, Dorothy Geyer, Chris and Tony Nolan and Dorothy Whitfield.

## EARLY MIGRANT BIRD WORKSHOP AT KIPTOPEKE

By Brian Taber

Dot Field of the Natural Heritage Program and I will be conducting a workshop, sponsored by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, on August 23 from 8 a.m. until noon. The topic will be early migrant birds, butterflies and coastal ecology. We'll meet at Kiptopeke State Park. Note: The songbird banding station will be in operation.

## BIRDING WEEKEND AT CHINCOTEAGUE ISLAND

The Virginia Society of Ornithology is sponsoring a weekend of birding at Chincoteague September 5 -7. The weekend features planned birding trips to the many areas of Chincoteague and nearby Assateague Island. There are walking trips and boating trips and those areas should be filled with migrating shore birds. The event is headquartered at the Refuge Motor Inn, P.O. Box 378, Beach Road, Chincoteague, Virginia 23336. Phone 800-757-336-5511. Room rates are \$81.38 for a single or double room. Make reservations by August 6<sup>th</sup> and state that you are with the VSO. (You may get this later than August 6 but if you are interested call them anyway.)

## FIELD NOTES FOR JUNE & JULY

*(Please report interesting bird sightings to Bill Holcombe at 229-8057 or at [bowljack@aol.com](mailto:bowljack@aol.com) or at 4705 Lady Slipper Path, Williamsburg, Va. 23188)*

Reports this summer have been few and far between. I personally haven't done much but watch the geese in the 199 - Rt. 5 pond and note the frequent appearances of the Great Egret and the Great Blue Heron there. I'd hoped to report Whip-poor-wills on the Bible Farm road but came up dry on three evening trips. I did see a good number of shore birds at Chincoteague in June.

Brian Taber had no trouble on his June-July trip to Wales and England finding birds to report. Brian saw and heard Nightingales, Pie Wagtails, Gray Wag Tails, Chiffchaff, Great Crested Grebe, Jackdaw, and, made famous in many plays, movies, novels and popular songs, Skylark, plus a bunch with names more familiar to us. He also saw some great scenery and wonderful old structures and Welsh villages

with unpronounceable and nearly unspellable names.

As reported elsewhere, Ruth Beck has a very large population of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds draining her many feeders and on a recent day she and Sherwin counted 53 of those little jewels.

Those indefatigable birders, Grace and Joe Doyle continued their regular patrols of Camp Peary and reported on June and July sightings. On the last two Sundays in June and the first two Sundays in July they had counts of 64 species; got the first Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Green-backed Heron June 15. Their highlights included a fairly complete list of non-shore birds in summer Williamsburg: Pied-billed Grebe, Brown Pelican, Great Egret, Green-backed Heron, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Wild Turkey, Northern Bobwhite, Clapper Rail, Killdeer, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pee-wee, Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Fish Crow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Wood Thrush, Varied Thrush, Brown Thrasher, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Black-throated Blue warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Rufous-sided Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow and Orchard Oriole.

## CHECKING OVER VIRGINIA'S EMAIL BIRDLIST

July's reports did more sharing of interesting sights and asking questions than strictly reporting on presence of birds but there was some of that too. There were at least five reports commenting on the magnificent movie, "Migration Flight." Locally, the Kimball Theater's last showing was August 5. I'll be surprised if there is not a return visit and I for one will see it again.

Interesting stories included experiencing a pair of robins taking over an empty cardinal's nest and fledging a brood from it. This prompted replies that added four or five similar observations over past years.

Then there was a neat report about a Wood Duck that thinks he is a Canada Goose. The observer

noted a family of Wood Ducks that had fledged three ducklings on a pond near their house. Then the family appeared to have just two offspring before departing elsewhere. That is when a lone Wood Duck appeared on the bank of the pond with a group of Canada Geese. This Wood Duck feeds in the grass with the geese, returns to the water when they do, swims in their formation and does everything but squawk like a goose. The observer is anxious to see if he starts flying in formation with his new family.

Then there is the man who was watching a Least Bittern at Cedar Run Wetlands near Quantico when a black bear ambled across the wetlands pausing to eat and drink from time to time. The man thought that he was seeing a large labrador retriever until he focused his binoculars on this intruder.

There was also a warning from a birder whose car was broken into while he was birding. He lost an almost new pair of binoculars, a laptop computer and his Sibley bird guide. His advice: "Don't think that you are in the company of only those friendly birders when out in the boonies, and lock everything up."

Dave Spahr who works for the Wildlife Center of Virginia asks Virginia birders to pay special attention to any and all robins that they see. Check them for signs of warts on bare skin areas near the mouth and around the eyes and on the legs. This may be a sign of an avian pox virus that he has detected in some robins. Email your best descriptions of what you saw, when and where to [jspahr@augustamed.com](mailto:jspahr@augustamed.com).

There also were some interesting sightings:

7/10 – Dickcissels in Fauquier County

7/16 – Black-bellied Whistling Ducks in Chesterfield County

7/17 – Wilson's Phalarope at Craney Island

7/18 – Sora Rail near Briery Branch in Rockingham County

7/19 – Mississippi Kites at Stumpy Lake, Virginia Beach

7/20 – Also at Stumpy Lake, Anningas.

7/24 – Swallow-tailed Kites over the York River near the mouth of Sarah's Creek

7/29 – Immature Tundra Swan on Legget's Pond, Halifax County

Bill Snyder called after getting the Spring Count report to ask if the Club would like to visit his home property of twenty some acres on Powhatan Creek during these counts. This location falls within the College Woods area and Ruth Beck was delighted to accept Bill's generous offer.

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT TOTAL COMPILATION

The 103<sup>rd</sup> Christmas Bird Count results in magazine form arrived recently with all sorts of interesting statistics and analyses.

The big picture shows 73,137,928 birds being counted by 55,994 observers organized into 1,981 counting groups covering an area from the Canadian Arctic Tundra to the Straits of Tierra del Fuego and from St. Johns, Newfoundland westward to the Mariana Islands in the Pacific. 1585 of those counts were in the United States, 334 in Canada and 62 elsewhere. 660 species were identified in Canada and the U.S. and 200 elsewhere. The highest species count for North America was made by the count at Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh, Texas. The highest species count outside North America was the stunning number 400 tallied at the Rain Forest Aerial Tram Count in Costa Rico.

The average species count in Canada and the U.S. is in the 70s and 80s. 82 U.S. counts exceeded 150 species, those lists drawn largely from counts in California, Texas and Louisiana. Cape Charles is the only Virginia location on that list, having a total of 155 species. In North Carolina the count at Southport-Bald Head-Oak Islands had 171 species. Williamsburg's species count was 110 and our all time high count is 115.

Every species is listed with the location of the highest count reported. Of those high number species in Virginia, Fort Belvoir was high count for Red-bellied Woodpeckers (459) and Pileated Woodpeckers (128), Carolina Chickadee (1,330) and Carolina Wrens (688). Mathews reported the most Eastern Bluebirds (968). Dismal Swamp the highest number of Hermit Thrushes (276) and Hopewell's (3,808) Cedar Waxwings was tops for that species.

In general, the analyses showed this 103<sup>d</sup> Christmas Count to be a fairly average affair, having few wide variations from norm.