



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 28, Number 8

Website: www.wmbgbirdclub.com

September 2004

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Alex Minarik

Welcome back to the second "half" of the Williamsburg Bird Club year! I hope you have had a good summer. I certainly have.

I enjoyed two field trips to two varied regions of the state: Mt. Rogers with the Virginia Society of Ornithology in late June and Craney Island in mid-August with our club. At Mt. Rogers, Virginia's highest point at 5,729 feet, I saw breeding Hermit Thrushes, Purple Finches, Juncos, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Black-Capped Chickadees and Winter Wrens. And at Craney, I saw 21 species of shore birds, including these four life birds: Wilson's Phalarope, Hudsonian Godwit, Upland Sandpiper and White-rumped Sandpiper. We are very fortunate to have such diverse habitats in our state and the opportunity to see so many birds so close to home. I hope you will take advantage of the field trips that VSO and WBC offer during the year.

NEXT MEETING IS SEPTEMBER 15

Plan to join us Wednesday, September 15, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 at Millington Hall at William and Mary for the "Bird Club Book Club." Tom McCary invites you to join him to discuss the book, The Big Year, by Mark Obmascik. Tom will give his impressions of the book in "The Race to Record: A Review of The Big Year." Then he'll show a video of the April segment from PBS's News Hour with Jim Lehrer in which correspondent Margaret Warner interviewed the author. The subtitle of the book is "A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession." You're invited to share your ideas about the book, the competition and the results of The Big Year. Even if you have not read the book, come to the meeting and someone will most likely lend you a copy, because you'll definitely want to read it after the discussion.

SEPTEMBER FIELD TRIP

The September Field Trip will be to Kiptopeke State Park on Saturday, September 18. We'll bird the Wildlife Refuge and check out the hawks at the Park's Hawk Watch Platform. You can also check out the bird banding operation at Kiptopeke. If the Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands are open, we'll stop by there as well. This is a full day of great birding!

Like last month, carpooling is very important for this destination (considering the toll both ways)! Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Colony Square Shopping Center parking lot on Jamestown Road (close to the Fresh Market) where we'll consolidate in carpools. Bring lunch and beverages as the group plans to be at the Hawk Watch around lunch time. Dress in layers to be prepared for cool and warm weather. Again this is a good trip for spotting scopes. Cameras are useful to take close up pictures of banded hawks brought to the platform for display before release.

CLUB FUND RAISER UNDERWAY

The Bird Club will be selling beautiful, colorful enamel Red-headed Woodpecker lapel pins to raise additional funds. The pins will be available at the September meeting. They will cost \$5 each and are suitable for men or women. They will look great on your jacket or blazer and will make great gifts for your birding friends.

AUGUST BIRD SIGHTINGS

Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Shirley Devan at 220-6269 (evening phone) or sedevan52@cox.net (home email). If you encounter interesting birds on your vacation/travels, please share!

August 1, 2004: Joe & Grace Doyle find 3 Tricolored Herons at Camp Peary in a drained beaver pond.

August 2: Bill Williams reports: "The Tricolored Herons must be widespread, as is the case with

most of that ilk post-breeding. I had one, a hatch year bird, on the Greensprings Trail today. Species 196!"

August 3: Tom Armour reports a female Purple Finch at his feeder.

August 8: Bill Williams reports from the Greensprings Trail: Gray Catbird-2, Kentucky Warbler-1, American Redstart-1, Canada Warbler-1, Bobolink-1.

August 8: Alex Minarik reports from her yard: "I saw a Prothonotary Warbler in the pyracantha beside my deck."

August 17: Alex Minarik reports from her yard: "I saw White-eyed and Red-eyed Vireos, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, an American Redstart and a Wood Thrush from my deck overlooking the back yard. Total yard birds for the day was 18."

August 25: Tom Armour reports: "At the airport, I had a Sharp-shinned Hawk flyover, first one this fall migration."

August 29: Alex Minarik reports seeing the albino Northern Mockingbird at Governor's Land. The guard said that members of the club are invited to come in to see it. Just stop at the guard cottage and let them know what you are there for. Here are directions to the bird: From the entrance road take the first right onto Two Rivers Rd. Proceed 2.3 miles to just past River Oaks Rd. Scan the area to your left. The bird really stands out! A good time is early evening.

August 30: For the second year in a row, Paul and Carol McAllister had a pair of Yellow Crown Night Herons nest in their yard in Kingsmill. This year's pair started building a nest in a large pine near their driveway on May 19th. On June 26th, broken blue egg shells were found on the driveway. By August 5th, four immature herons were seen moving in the nest and on the limb. August 21 was the last day the birds were seen in the yard. The McAllisters are not certain if this is the same pair that nested in a pine near their back porch in 2003. That tree and nest were blown over by Hurricane Isabel and ended up on their roof!

59 SPECIES ON AUGUST 21 TRIP TO CRANEY ISLAND

Tom Armour, Field Trip Coordinator, reports: "We had a fine time and found some great birds. Dan Cristol led the trip, attended by Allan Cristol (his dad), Josh LeClerc, Alex Minarik, Ron & Bobbie Geise, Eleanor Young, Dave Anderton, Brac Bracalente and myself. We had a total of 59 species, including 21 species of shore birds – six great birds were: a Marbled Godwit, a Hudsonian Godwit, an Upland Sandpiper, 3 Wilson's Phalaropes, a Lesser Black-backed Gull and 10

American Avocets. Dan did such a super job of finding birds, I think he should lead all the trips."

CONSERVATION CORNER

By Dan Cristol

Bird migration is in full swing. Among song-birds, adults generally come through first, moving quickly past in August and September. Then the young straggle south, often getting lost. Birds that are moving across unfamiliar terrain are very vulnerable to predators.

In your yard that means cats, either yours or a neighbor's. While local birds generally become familiar with the hunting patterns of predators and avoid getting eaten, migrants are really easy targets. If you have a birdbath or feeder out, you are inviting migrants to their death if there's ever a cat in your yard.

Solutions are: 1) never let your cat out, especially if you have a feeder; 2) get your neighbors to keep their cat in, or at least out of your yard. If there's a stray around, catch it and get it taken away. 3) Keep feeders and water at least 15 feet from dense brush where cats hide. Cats are ambush predators and they don't do as well when they have to stalk out in the open. If you have feeders near a brush-pile, set up additional feeders in a safe location for birds to use at dawn and dusk when they are particularly likely to succumb to a cat ambush. You'll notice the birds use the safe feeder early in the morning, then switch to the one near the brush pile later in the day when they need to be ready to get away from hawks by darting into the brush-pile. Placing a feeder on the second floor window of your house, near the other feeders, is a good way to provide safe dawn feeding for birds.

HAWK WATCHES AROUND VA

The summer lull is over and the fall migrations have begun. You've probably seen migrants in your yards. August and September also mean that Hawk Watches (and counts!) are back in business full time. There are several around Virginia as well as the famous Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania. I've gleaned the following information about several Virginia Hawk Watch efforts from the VSO's ListServe email postings. Luckily, the WBC September field trip will include one of the best hawk watching spots in Virginia – the CVWO's operation at Kiptopeke State Park. I've included contact information about the others and directions, if you want to check one out on a beautiful autumn weekend. – *Shirley Devan, Co-Editor.*

Kiptopeke Hawk Watch on the Eastern Shore: Zach Smith is operating the hawk banding

program at Kiptopeke State Park for the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. Zach was hawk counter for CVWO two years ago and helped at the end of the season last year with hawk banding. Sam Stuart will be the hawk watcher at Kiptopeke. By mid-September, David Haynes will be capturing Monarch butterflies and giving presentations to the public. See the note below about the CVWO bird banding operation at Kiptopeke.

The Observatory looks forward to another great season of field research and public presentations and invites everyone to come and enjoy the migration. Contact Brian Taber, CVWO and WBC member at: <taberzz@aol.com>

Snickers Gap Hawk Watch was established in 1990. It is located in northern Virginia, on the Clarke and Loudoun County line. It is reached by taking VA Route 7 to the county line, which runs atop the ridge at Snickers Gap. On the south side of Route 7 is a commuter parking lot. The count is conducted from there. It is a volunteer site and is counted in fall only, from late August until late November or early December. There are no facilities at the site, so bring a snack, drinks and a chair. Many of the birds can be distant so a scope is helpful. Please contact the compiler, Todd Day, at blkvulture@aol.com with questions.

Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch - Fall 2004 Season

The 28th season officially opened Friday, August 13. The Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch is run by volunteer counters and is supported by three area bird clubs – Augusta, Monticello and Rockingham Bird Clubs. It's hosted by The Inn at Afton.

Currently the official fall migration count is held on the grounds of the Inn at Afton, located on the southern side of Rockfish Gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains, just above where I-64 (exit 99) intersects with the southern end of the Skyline Drive and the northern end of the Blue Ridge Parkway, just east of Waynesboro and approximately 22 miles west of Charlottesville.

The web site has been updated with a new look and incorporates many added features. Check it out at

<http://home.ntelos.net/~btkin/rockfish_gap_hawk_watch/> Contact: <BrendaTekin,bt8x@virginia.edu> Co-coordinator, Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch, VA.

BANDING STATION AT KIPTOPEKE IN BUSINESS

The Kiptopeke banding station started the fall season August 15. Operated by the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO), the station opened for action today at Kiptopeke State Park on Virginia's Eastern Shore. Here are a

couple of reports by Head Bander, Jethro Runco, sure to whet your appetite for the September 18 club field trip:

August 15: Many of the birds caught today were quite fat -- always a good sign. By the time we called it a day, we had banded 41 birds, had 3 recaptures from previous seasons and two hummingbirds that were not banded. Warblers made a nice showing for our first day of banding, with the highlight being an extremely beautiful hatch year, male Blue-winged Warbler!

August 30: After a very slow start again, on our third net run of the morning, there was a Golden-winged Warbler in the net! A very uncommon capture for Kiptopeke. Last year we caught one during the birding festival and none in 2001 and 2002. We also caught the first American Robins, Tufted Titmouse and Downy Woodpecker for the season today as well. Also today, we recaptured a Blue-winged Warbler that we first banded on the 22nd of August! It's great to recapture a migrant like that after 8 days. By the way, the Blue-winged Warbler lost 0.6 grams between captures (roughly 7% of it's body weight).

The Kiptopeke banding station is open seven days a week, weather permitting. We start a half hour before sunrise and go roughly 7-8 hours after that. The public is always welcome and encouraged. Early in the morning is highly recommended if you are planning a visit. Bird activity is pretty low by noon. Our first net run is usually just after sunrise. I hope everyone is planning his or her trip to the shore! See you there! Cheers, Jethro Runco, <jethro_runco@hotmail.com> Head Bander, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory

WEB SITE FOR VSO

Check out the Virginia Society of Ornithology's new web site to get the details about upcoming field trip weekends: September 17-19 at Chincoteague and December 3-5 in Virginia Beach (Back Bay and False Cape areas, plus more.) Here's the web site: <<http://www.virginia-birds.net/>>

BIRDING IN SANTA BARBARA CA

By Shirley Devan

Birding vacations with my husband are a non-event. He just doesn't see the charm in wandering around a strange place before breakfast fighting off the mosquitoes, chiggers and biting flies to look for a bird or two or three.

But when we planned a summer trip to Santa Barbara for his nephew's wedding, I was determined to find a birding opportunity – either with a group or on my own. Scouting around on the

Internet led me to the California Central Coast Birding Trail and the web site for the Santa Barbara Audubon Society. I emailed Jack Sanford, the club's field trip coordinator, to see if by a miracle the club had any local trips scheduled for the half day that I had available and not committed to wedding events (i.e., Saturday morning.)

I was thrilled when I learned that the club was sponsoring a trip Saturday, July 24 from 8:30 – 10:30 a.m. It was meant to be – the timing could not have been better. The schedule would give me plenty of time to see a few birds and then get showered and dressed for the wedding at 2 p.m.

We only had one rental car, so my husband dropped me off at Goleta Beach County Park near the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) to meet Jack and the group. Our group numbered about 16 birders – some from as far as 60 miles away. Jack Sanford was a knowledgeable and enthusiastic leader and kept us moving to find those birds. The weather was typical southern California weather – 70's, sunny, and low humidity. Paradise!

Goleta Beach County Park is designed for beach goers and surfers, but it also has a brackish water estuary with great views from the parking lot. The highlights that morning: two Long-billed Curlew (a thrilling life bird for me), Black-necked Stilts, Black-crowned Night Herons, Green Herons, Semi-palmated Plover, Herman's Gull, California Gull, Western Gull, Green Heron, Snowy Egret and Great Egret, among others.

After scanning the ocean side with not much to report, we walked around to the neighboring Atascadero Creek and the bike path that runs alongside. This creek runs into the estuary and features field edges, utility wires, creek side willows and cliffs. The highlights (for this East Coast birder) were several Western Bluebirds and a Western Scrub Jay. Western Bluebirds are not as stunningly brilliant blue as Eastern Bluebirds but they have that same profile when they sit on the wires, so I was able to spot them right away. Other birds we spotted were the Belted Kingfisher, American Goldfinch, American Coot, Pie-billed Grebe and Double-crested Cormorant. Our total for the two hours was 27 species.

Just when I thought the morning could not get any better, Roger Milliken, one of the local birders, asked if I had a few minutes to see the Devereaux Slough on the other side of the UCSB campus. It was only 11 a.m. – still plenty of time to get to that wedding! So my husband and I followed Roger through campus up to the observation point overlooking the slough. Right off the bat I spotted a Loggerhead Shrike and Roger confirmed it. Numerous Black-crowned Night Herons were

roosting in the trees. We only stayed about 20 minutes but I noted that spot for a future visit when I could spend more time.

Of course we made it to the wedding in plenty of time. We are planning to return to Santa Barbara for Thanksgiving and I'm looking forward to more birding adventures. My sister-in-law called a few days ago to tell me that she had won a set of field glasses and a book about Santa Barbara birding at a local auction. So I have a **willing** birding companion for my next Santa Barbara birding adventure!

INVITATION TO BIRD NEWPORT NEWS PARK WITH HR BIRD CLUB

Eleanor Young, a WBC member and Hampton Roads Bird Club member, invites Williamsburg folks to join the twice-a-month bird walks at Newport News Park. They sally forth from the Park Ranger Parking Lot (near picnic area 1) at 7:00 a.m. on the first and third Sundays of each month all year round (except for the weekend of the Newport News Fall Festival.) The group birds until about 9:00 a.m. Eleanor reports these birds seen on the August 1 trip: Eastern Kingbird, Pewee, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron (star of the day!), Chickadee, Northern Cardinal, Northern Mockingbird, Song Sparrows, Eastern Bluebirds, American Robins, House Finches, Prairie Warblers, Prothonotary Warblers (also star of the day!), Brown Thrasher, Osprey, Belted Kingfisher, Mourning Doves and Turkey Vultures.

She reports from her yard in Newport News that she's been seeing the following birds throughout the summer (nesting, feeding young, teaching them to fly and catch food, etc.): Song Sparrows, Northern Cardinals, Purple Finches (male and female at her feeders), House Finches, American Goldfinches, House Sparrows, Blue Jays, Chipping Sparrows, Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, Mourning Doves, European Starlings, Great Blue Herons (flying over around dusk), and a Red-shouldered Hawk that flies over "once in a blue moon."

REPORT FROM CAMP PEARY

Grace and Joe Doyle birded Camp Peary each Sunday in August and reported a high count of 56 species on August 1, the highlight being the previously noted Tri-colored Herons (3). Other highlights for August 1: Green Heron, Black Vulture, Black Duck, Greater Yellowlegs, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Chimney Swift, Great-crested Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Ovenbird, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager.

August 8: 53 species. Highlights include: Bald Eagle, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Purple Martin, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Blue Grosbeak and Field Sparrow.

August 15: 50 species. Highlights include: Wild Turkey, Red-tailed Hawk, Common Tern, Red-eyed Vireo, White-eyed Vireo, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Towhee and Summer Tanager.

August 22: 43 species. Highlights include: Osprey, Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey, Lesser Yellowlegs, Common Tern, Red-headed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch and Pine Warbler.

August 29: 44 species. Highlights include: Snowy Egret, Tri-colored Heron (again), Mute Swan, Osprey (still), Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Lesser Yellowlegs, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Tree Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Eastern Blue-bird, Pine Warbler, Summer Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Towhee.

Their weekly visits and ongoing records are important because of the bird population trends observed over time in that area. Thanks to Grace and Joe for sharing their observations!

97 BLUEBIRDS FLEDGED AT YORK RIVER STATE PARK

By Shirley Devan

The bluebird nesting season is over at York River State Park and 97 Eastern Bluebirds fledged in 2004. Nineteen chickadees fledged earlier in the spring. 2004 has been a much better year for the bluebirds than last year when 56 bluebirds fledged. Here are the year end results for the 7 years the club has been monitoring the boxes:

	Eastern Bluebirds	Carolina Chickadees
1998	68 total bluebirds & chickadees	
1999	84	31
2000	86	9
2001	115	12
2002	116	20
2003	56	24
2004	97	19

As in past years, 2004 data will be entered in Cornell's Lab of Ornithology Citizen Science/-Nest Box Network data base to be studied in aggregate with data from other next indexes from around the US. Year to year data are important in the aggregate because they give researchers (and birders!) an idea of the health of nest box species

and identify trends. Thanks to all the hardy volunteers who spent hours at the park this season (trust us – we wouldn't do it if it weren't great fun): Chris and Tony Dion, Dorothy Geyer and her mother Lillian Geyer, Carol and Dave Goff, Terry and Jack Johnston, Diana and Jack Nolan and Dorothy Whitfield. Thanks also to the staff and volunteers at YRSP who keep the trails mowed – no small task this summer with all the rain. Also thanks to the Bird Club who finances the out-of-pocket costs for replacement and maintenance of the boxes.

12TH ANNUAL EASTERN SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL OCT. 8 – 10

This annual festival at Kiptopeke, VA on the Eastern Shore offers an exciting array of walking and boating tours to highlight the area's birding and wildlife hot spots. Festival headquarters will be at the Best Western Sunset Beach Resort. There's a 10K Fun Run, music, wildlife art displays, nature-oriented retailers, children's activities, and educational exhibits. Brad Andres, a nationally acclaimed expert on shorebirds will be this year's featured guest speaker. For more information, contact the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce at 757-787-2460 or www.esvachamber/birding.org.

HARVEST MOON DINNER & DANCE SEPTEMBER 25 AT YRSP

This outdoor dinner and dance at the park's amphitheater September 25 from 7:00 – 10:30 p.m. features the Williamsburg Classic Swing Band and a Gourmet Buffet Dinner with Prime Rib and Crabcakes. This is a fundraising event to benefit the Friends of York River State Park, which provides funding for the park's interpretive and educational programs, visitor exhibits and hiking, biking and horse trails. A portion of the ticket price (\$50 per person) is tax deductible. You can purchase tickets at any Citizens & Farmers Bank, the park visitor center, or call the park at 566-3036 to order with credit card. A grand affair for a great cause!

CONDORS RETURN TO GRAND CANYON

By Bill Holcombe

A brief trip to the Grand Canyon was crammed into a trip to the southwest and the very first thing that we saw when approaching the rim was a Condor! My first thought was that it might be a Golden Eagle until a nearby watcher said, "No, look at the dangling legs. It's a Condor." Subse-

quently we had several more sightings and got the story.

In brief, there are now 47 adult Condors and one chick living in the Canyon. All of the adults were hatched in San Diego, CA but the chick is a recent natural, blessed event. All of the adults wear radio transmitters with a unique identifying code and they are under regular surveillance. The organization responsible for this introduction has set its sights on bringing the birds back to the Oregon and Washington coasts as there is evidence that they once thrived there.

250 Bald Eagles also now reside in the canyon whereas none were known to live there prior to 2000. That is when a dam was added to the Colorado River to reduce the silt content that was threatening to fill up the existing dams. The silt was destroying the ability to maintain the river's flow, now essential to the existence of a dozen or so major cities. Trout immediately started multiplying in the cleaner river to such an extent that they cut the diversity of the fish life in half, while providing appetizing meals for the Bald Eagles. These had previously migrated every fall through the canyon to more promising fishing areas farther south. Until the water cleared, the eagles evidently agreed with early pioneers who complained that the Colorado was "too thin to plow and too thick to drink".

NEW BOOK ON HISTORY OF ORNITHOLOGY IN VIRGINIA

Source of review: WMI Wildlife Management Institute, Outdoor News Bulletin, August 2004

"Newly released by the University of Virginia Press is The History of Ornithology in Virginia (2004), authored by David Johnston. It is a very informative and useful work that explores the bird life of Virginia back to prehistoric time, to colonial time to today. It also examines Virginia birders and ornithologists of note, and there have been quite a number. Because many of the early avian enthusiasts who contributed significantly to the science, art and conservation of bird life in the Americas had footing in Virginia, this scholarly but very readable, 219-page book is not nearly as provincial as the title might indicate. It is well worth the \$35.00 price tag. To order, call 1-800-831-3406, or order by email at unpressva@virginia.edu."

POOR BREEDING SHOREBIRD SEASON IN CANADIAN ARCTIC

By Ron Pittaway, Ontario Field Ornithologists Minden and Toronto, ON

Very few southbound juvenile shorebirds from

the arctic are currently migrating through southern Ontario indicating a failed nesting season for many northern species. For example, at Townsend Sewage Lagoons near Lake Erie on 8 August, Kevin McLaughlin saw 400-500 adult Semi-palmated Sandpipers and only one juvenile. He saw only 5-6 juvenile Lesser Yellowlegs among 200-300 adults and had few juvenile Least Sand-pipers. Juveniles of all these species should be common by now. This spring and summer have been exceptionally cold, wet and windy in much of northern Canada from James Bay to the High Arctic Islands. Here are reports from six biologists and birders, five of whom were in the north this summer.

1. Ken Ross, waterfowl and shorebird biologist, Canadian Wildlife Service: "It looks to me that there has been a general failure of breeding shorebirds from the Hudson Bay Lowlands north. Certainly goose productivity was well down along the Hudson Bay coast where it was still winter in late May. And I have heard that the Arctic was even worse. Ken Abraham was telling me that shorebirds appeared to be migrating earlier than usual in the James Bay area, probably reflecting a large proportion of failed breeders."

2. Ken Abraham, biologist and research scientist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), studies waterfowl and shorebirds around James Bay and Hudson Bay: He reports, "Strong indications that the extremely late year spring (May/June) and cold/wet summer (June-July) was indeed a poor year for breeding shorebirds. My student Linh Nguyen had a fair number of Semipalmated Plover nests this year, but a ragged nesting season with very high egg predation, really asynchronous timing and changes in nest density among areas, compared to his two previous summers. While banding 12-23 July we witnessed increasing numbers of Pectoral Sandpipers, a few Ruddy Turnstones, hundreds of both species of yellowlegs and a very early massing of Marbled Godwits (in my experience). We had Marbled Godwits in flocks alone and mixed with Hudsonian Godwits at several locations from the extreme south end of James Bay (Hannah Bay) up to Lake River and including Akimiski Island (largest island in James Bay). I suspect that Marbled Godwit, in particular, had a poor year, but possibly so did Hudsonian Godwit." Note: isolated James Bay population of Marbled Godwits is probably about 3000 birds.

3. Don Sutherland, zoologist with the Natural Heritage Information Centre of the OMNR, reported: "My guess is that there was widespread nest failure of shorebirds and many other arctic-subarctic bird species in eastern Canada. When we arrived at the Pen Islands (Ontario/Manitoba border of Hudson Bay) on June 23rd, things really hadn't started yet. There was still substantial ice

on many of the larger lakes, large snowdrifts in the lee of ridges and spruce copses, hardly a hint of plant growth anywhere, and several inches of water on the wet tundra. Many of the local species including the common shorebird species (Stilt Sandpiper, Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Short-billed Dowitcher, Hudsonian Godwit, Whimbrel, Red-necked Phalarope, American Golden-Plover) were displaying, but weren't behaving as though they had initiated nests. After a few days we started flushing more birds from scrapes and partial clutches and by the time we departed on July 7th there were even some clutches starting to hatch (e.g., Least Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper). More telling though were the large flocks of shorebirds present throughout the period. These were either failed breeders or birds which had just opted not to try. Among these were substantial mixed flocks of Hudsonian Godwits and Short-billed Dowitchers (which breed more commonly in the taiga-tundra transition) and large mixed species aggregations including large numbers of Stilt Sandpipers (150 in one flock). Many of these flocks were concentrated in ponds along the coast but were also present six or more kilometers inland.

Also of interest was the near absence of both Semipalmated Plover and Semipalmated Sandpiper. These should have been present and not uncommon (as they have been in other years) on the gravel ridges bordering wet tundra near the coast, but we saw very few of either and found no nests. Other species which typically breed further inland (e.g., both yellowlegs and Bonaparte's Gulls) were also loafing in ponds near the coast. Waterfowl also had a poor time of it. Large numbers of scaup of both species just hanging around and no evidence of breeding even by Long-tailed Ducks which were just sitting in pairs on ponds. There was a total failure of the Snow Goose colony and near total failure of locally breeding Canada Geese. This phenomenon wasn't restricted to the Ontario coast as Churchill apparently was a bust as were other places in the eastern Canadian Arctic. Just one of those years!"

4. Farther north, Jim Richards of Orono, Ontario, spent 27 June - 13 July at Cambridge Bay on Victoria Island in Nunavut Territory. He reported, "That overall numbers of birds present at the end of June was down by at least 60%. Of those there only a small percentage were actually nesting. In past years species such as Semipalmated Sandpipers were usually found at a rate of 4-6 nests per day with normal walking. This year I found one nest in 16 days! Needless to say, it was very cold, very wet and very windy."

5. Glenn Coady of Toronto, Ontario, was atlasing in the Hudson Bay Lowlands and was in contact with other groups in the north: He summarized,

"Discussing shorebird nesting success with all the Ontario Hudson Bay atlas groups, Mark Peck's experience on Southampton Island in Nunavut, Jim Richards' experience at Cambridge Bay in Nunavut, as well as one of my birding friends who was at Churchill this summer, it would appear very few shorebirds were able to successfully breed in the frigid conditions across the arctic this summer. Many didn't even attempt to nest, and a lot of those that did likely failed in the horrific windstorms. Jim Richards told me that areas he covered at Cambridge Bay that normally would have resulted in sightings of 70 Semipalmated Sandpipers and 30 Baird's Sandpipers per day, proved this summer to be lucky to find more than one or two birds. He found only one Semipalmated Sandpiper nest the entire trip, and it only had a clutch of two eggs. The fact that it also was a poor year for small mammals (and Canada Geese and Snow Geese failed en masse too) in much of the arctic meant what few shorebirds that were going to nest successfully probably encountered heavier than normal predation from foxes, jaegers, gulls and owls."

6. Alvaro Jaramillo of California on 6 August reported: "Juvenile shorebirds are down here already, but not the main push. It seems like a lot of the north was suffering from very bad weather. Alaska was very cold and rainy this season. I hope I am wrong and you begin to see a ton of juvenile shorebirds, but my guess is that it will be a weak year for them."

*I hope that birders will report the numbers and age ratios of southbound arctic shorebirds during August, September and October. This will give us better information on the nesting success of northern shorebirds in 2004.

Acknowledgments: The following biologists/birders were very helpful with information: Ken Abraham, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Glenn Coady, Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas; Bill Crins, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Michel Gosselin, Canadian Museum of Nature; Jean Iron, Toronto, Ontario; Andrew Jano, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Alvaro Jaramillo, Half Moon Bay, California; Kevin McLaughlin, Hamilton, Ontario; Mark Peck, Royal Ontario Museum; Jim Richards, Orono, Ontario; Mike Runtz, Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas; Ken Ross, Canadian Wildlife Service; Don Sutherland, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Ron Tozer, Dwight, Ontario.