



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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May 2004

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Alex Minarik

During the second week of May, there is no lovelier place to be than the G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area in Fauquier County. I leave Williamsburg at 5:30 A.M. for the 3 hour trip out there. I am rewarded for my efforts by the white trillium, mayapples and wild geraniums that cover the forest floor and the reliably great birding. The trees on the mountainside are not yet fully leafed out so it is easy to spot the birds. Often the birds are at eye-level as I walk up and down the trails. I always see cerulean, hooded, Kentucky, worm-eating, and black-throated-blue warblers, redstarts, ovenbirds, rose-breasted grosbeaks, scarlet tanagers and indigo buntings. And then there are surprises, like the Nashville warbler I saw last year.

To get to this little piece of heaven, take the Markham exit (Exit 18) off of I-66, and travel west on SR 55 4 miles to Linden. Turn right onto Rt. 638 (Freezeland Rd.) and drive about 5 miles to the third parking area on the right.

JUNE 6 ANNUAL PICNIC

This is a favorite annual event and everyone's invited to this culinary and ornithological feast! You can be sure of great food, great birds and great conversation. Ruth and Sherwin Beck will graciously open their Barhamsville home and yard to us for a picnic Sunday, June 6 at 4 p.m.

You should call Jean Armour, 229-2363, and let her know that you are coming and discuss what you might contribute to the feast. Jean keeps track of salads, side dishes, and desserts and it always works out just great. Dress is casual. Bring your binoculars – there's usually a birding walk-about before dinner. Or you can sit on the deck and pick out birds on the lake.

Directions to the Beck's house: Take I-64 west toward Richmond to exit #227, Route 30 going toward West Point. Follow Route 30 about three miles to Barhamsville. The center of Barhamsville

extends along the road for less than a mile. Look for the Post Office on your right. Then immediately look for a secondary paved road, Route 273, also going to the right. Follow it for two miles. As the forested area to your right suddenly gives way to open fields, there will be a gravel road to the right. Take that road and stay on it. It will turn into the Becks' driveway.

CLUB FUND RAISER

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 May 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 (who are not yet members of the Bird Club!)

MAY 19 BIRD CLUB MEETING

Plan to join us Wednesday, May 19, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 at Millington Hall when Jeff Trollinger from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries tells us all about the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. "Within Virginia's 43,000 square miles of diverse habitat, you can find some 400 species of birds, 250 species of fish, 150 species of terrestrial and marine animals, 150 species of amphibians and reptiles, and a wide variety of aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates. The Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail celebrates this diversity. In fact, it is the first statewide program of its kind in the United States." Rumor has it that he'll bring free copies of the guides along.

TRIP TO THE DISMAL SWAMP

Bill Williams led 13 birders to the Dismal Swamp Saturday, April 24, in search of the Swainson's Warbler and other migrating woodland birds. We explored the Jericho Ditch area from about 7:30 to 10:30 am. Thanks to Bill's great birding ears, we can confirm that the Swainson's Warblers were on



Bill Williams led field trip to Dismal Swamp.

this territory, but they did not grace us with an appearance. Other great birds heard and/or seen: Black-throated Green Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Pine Warbler, Scarlet Tanager. Check the Bird Club web site for the complete listing of all 61 species (some of which were seen en route!)

We also heard four species of frogs – Carpenter, Green, Southern Cricket and Gray Tree Frog, plus four species of butterflies – Pearl Crescent, Palomedes Swallowtail, Carolina Satyr, American Lady.

Participants on the trip: Dave Anderton, Tom Armour, Brac Bracalente, Shirley Devan, John and Maryanne Fennel, Ron and Bobbie Geise, Faye Hobbs, Chuck Rend and Corina Young. Also joining the group were two visitors from Washington, D.C., Kay Polsgrove and Linda Fisher, who learned of the trip when they arrived in town Friday. They called Wild Birds Unlimited to inquire about local field trips. WBU referred them to Hugh Beard who provided the logistical details. Thanks to all who made the trip a memorable one – including Bill Williams, the drivers who carpooled, WBU and Hugh Beard.

RUTH BECK STILL SEEKING VOLUNTEERS

Ruth Beck can still use your assistance in the field. She requests your volunteer help at three different field sites in the Hampton Roads area. "You can help record all species of birds observed feeding in the area, their numbers, and habitat types. Also, we will visit colonies of nesting birds such as Least Terns, Black Skimmers, Common Terns and Laughing Gulls. We will search for Piping Plover, Black-necked Stilts, and Killdeer. Many other opportunities are available for a day or half-day of observing and monitoring. Please call at 757-221-2217 or email at rabeck@wm.edu. I especially need help during the peak nesting season, late May and June and early July."

ACTIVITIES SPONSORED BY CVWO – OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

May 15: Migratory Bird Day (MBD) activities in Northampton County. The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory aims to find as many species as possible in this southern county on the eastern shore. Come on down to experience the peak of spring migration on Virginia's famed Eastern Shore and record valuable data too! No habitat to be left uncounted! For more info and/or to volunteer, contact Tom Saunders, CVWO coordinator for MDB at 804-435-0351 (weekends) or tsaun@bay-creek.com.

June 5: Savage Neck Dunes Natural Area Preserve (NAP) Field Trip. Savage Neck Dunes is special for its unusual secondary dune system towering up to 50 feet. Learn how the diverse maritime plant communities on this preserve provide important habitat for migratory birds and get a close up look at a migratory bird habitat restoration project. From 9 AM – 1 PM; limited to 20; box lunch provided. Note: no public facilities available. This trip is co-sponsored by the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. Contact Dot Field, Natural Heritage Eastern Shore Region Steward, 757-787-5576.

CONSERVATION CORNER

By Dan Cristol

As I waited in traffic at 199 and Jamestown Road on April 9, a female turkey flew across the crowded intersection from McCardle Realty towards Suntrust Bank, slamming into the side of the bank with a great crash.

I quickly drove into the parking lot and approached the stunned bird, while my 3-year-old daughter wisely refused to get out of her car seat to help me. Just when I threw my jacket over the

hen (not sure exactly what I would do after catching her), she ran with incredible speed off into the wooded neighborhood behind the bank, hopefully towards more appropriate habitat. When I returned to the car my daughter was laughing hysterically at my antics.

While it's fun to see wildlife up close in the suburbs, this incident highlights an important issue facing our region – how can people and birds best survive side-by-side in the suburbs? Some birds adjust well to suburbs, expanding their numbers and taking advantage of human structures and the increase in sunlight and food offered by subdivisions (for example barn swallows and grackles.) Other birds disappear as soon as forests are fragmented and houses are built (for example, hooded warblers.)

In general, bird abundance goes up when a wild area is developed, but the number of species goes down and a few species make up the bulk of the birds present. As the turkey incident illustrates, suburbs create novel problems for species not accustomed to living around people. Birds face badly fragmented habitat, increased persecution (for example, nuisance geese and vultures), and increased densities of some predators and brown-headed cowbirds.

Several students at W&M are working on suburban bird issues, but much more information is needed. Without good information on what birds can survive in which types of human-dominated landscapes, we won't make much headway. But can we ever get to the point where developers can be convinced that they need to have more backyards abutting one another, and larger intact areas of habitat around retention ponds and common areas? Tiny patches of woods or grassland are of no value to birds. Will neighbors ever start managing groups of yards for the benefit of birds, so that breeding birds have larger areas of contiguous habitat and wintering birds can find food, water and thick cover in the same area?

These may seem like pipe dreams, but Americans are consuming far more land, per person, than ever before, and this is only going to get worse. Eventually, everything outside of public lands will be suburban or exurban (rural residential), and even much of our public land is now being developed for energy or forestry. This issue is a tall order for the average bird club member to tackle...and I am not suggesting that you give up on making your yard into bird habitat, but it's really time for us to put our voices together. I recommend visiting the website of the only organization that is a full-time lobbying group for birds. That's the American Bird Conservancy, and the site is www.abcbirds.org.

MAY 16 BROADCAST OF "PALE MALE" ON PBS'S NATURE SERIES

Tune in Sunday, May 16 to see the premier of "Pale Male" on PBS's Nature series (locally on WHRO-TV). Discover Manhattan's first resident Red-tailed Hawk, affectionately known by his devoted urban fans as "Pale Male." Onlookers gaze in rapt anticipation as the hawk courts, breeds, hunts and raises a family from his posh Fifth Avenue digs on the edge of Central Park. "Pale Male" is a rare glimpse of the survival techniques of one of nature's great predatory creatures, and a surprising account of the magical relationship humanity can have with nature. If you read Marie Winn's book, *Red Tails in Love*, you'll love the story on film. Narrated by Joanne Woodward, the 2003 film has won numerous awards including five awards at the International Wildlife Film Festival.

To see amazing photos and learn more, go to: <http://www.palemalethemovie.com/> or <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/palemale/>

APRIL BIRD SIGHTINGS

(Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Shirley Devan at 220-6269 (evening phone) or sedevan52@cox.net (home email)).

April 1: Ruth Beck reports: Eastern Phoebe settled on the nest and incubating. Pine Warblers (2) singing in the yard. Two Belted Kingfishers courting.

April 2: Ruth Beck reports: Eastern Bluebird nest depredated by squirrel. Nice group of 4 Chipping Sparrows.

April 3: Tom McCary reports Tree Swallows and Barn Swallows over the cotton fields at Shirley Plantation; Ruth Beck reports: Ruby Throated Hummingbird – fly by, not at the feeder. Oven Birds singing at two different sites about 1/4 mile apart. Two pairs of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers setting up territories. A pair of Pileated Woodpeckers feeding on insect larvae in the bark of damaged tree.

April 5: Ruth Beck reports: Two Blue-wing Teal on the lake – one male and one female. There is a mystery sipper at Hummingbird Feeder, suspect a Yellow-throated Warbler,

April 6: Ruth Beck reports: confirmed that the Yellow-throated Warbler is the mystery sipper coming to and drinking the juice. We removed one of the bee guards, for easier access to food. The adult has been coming daily to feed.

April 7: Tom Armour reports: at the James River hawk watch today, 1 Caspian Tern, 1st one for me this year, 25 Royal Terns, 25 Bonaparte's Gulls, 1 Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1 Northern Harrier, 1

Common Loon.

April 8: Ruth Beck reports: Louisiana Waterthrush observed singing and bobbing. Black and White Warbler. Large flock of Rough-wing Swallows feeding over the lake.

April 9: Bill Williams reports: Bart Paxton, one of the biologists here at the Center for Conservation Biology told me he saw a Mississippi Kite near Mill Creek off the Colonial Parkway (Jamestown end) on Friday, April 9!

April 9: Ruth Beck reports: Red eyed Vireo, One pair of American Wigeon, Prothonotary Warbler, singing and observed.

April 10: Ruth Beck reports: Indigo Bunting, Green Heron 3 birds, 2 male Hummingbirds coming to feeder; Tom McCary reports his first Chimney Swifts at Shirley Plantation.

April 11: Ruth Beck reports: 4 Ospreys, one adult Bald Eagle, one immature eagle

April 12: Ruth Beck reports: Two White-eyed Vireo singing, 7 Double Crested Cormorants drying wings. Hooded Warbler singing.

April 13: Ruth Beck reports: Gray Catbird and about 150 American Goldfinches everywhere on the ground and feeders.

April 13: Alex Minarik reports: I heard my first-of-the-year Parula warbler in my yard on Tuesday.

April 14: Ruth Beck reports: Small flock of Cedar Waxwings (30)

April 15: Ruth Beck reports: Hooded Warbler singing.

April 16: Alex Minarik: I checked my bird house in the front yard today and there were 5 Chickadee eggs in it.

April 16: Ruth Beck reports: Northern Waterthrush singing and observed. Neat bird!! Sam Skalak reports: at York River State Park: Northern Parulas, Common Yellowthroats and a Ruby Throated Hummingbird, along with many others; Tom McCary reports a Gray Catbird at his suet feeder.

April 17: Tom Armour reports: at Treasure Island Road – 2 Pectoral Sandpipers, 6 Lesser Yellowlegs, 19 Greater Yellowlegs. On the James River at the Hawk Watch: 350+ Double-crested Cormorants all in a line, east bound heading for the ocean and the north.

April 17: Alex Minarik reports: Had my first Ruby-throated Hummingbird of the year at my house today. (A check of last year's records revealed that I saw my first last year 10 days earlier on 4/7.)

April 17: Ruth Beck reports: Wood Thrush singing this morning. So good to have these vocalists back.

April 18: Alex Minarik reports: Today, I heard and saw my first Summer Tanager of the year while enjoying a cup of coffee on my back deck. After lunch, we walked the Jamestown Island loop and heard a Scarlet Tanager! Also at Jamestown were eight warbler species (Black and White, Ovenbird, Prairie, Parula, Pine, Yellow-throated, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow-rumped) and 5 woodpeckers (Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied, Red-headed and Pileated).

April 18: Bill Holcombe reports from Green-spring Trail: A gorgeous morning with endless squawking from the socializing geese, the air filled with Osprey carrying nesting materials and food catches, that burbling song of the Redwinged Blackbirds. Along with "the usuals," I saw a pair of Pine Warblers, a pair of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, a Common Yellowthroat and two Green Herons. I missed reporting the otter that stood up out of the water near the bridge on my last visit there. On my way home I stopped at the Hickory Signpost Bridge and found a Barred Owl nearby hooting back and forth with a more distant relative. And I was pleased to find that Joy Archer's Phoebe from under the bridge is still about.

April 18: Bill Williams reports that Mitchell and Lois Byrd observed a male Western Tanager near the entrance to Chippokes State Park in Surry County about 11:15 a.m. on Sunday, April 18. They were birding at College Run, a narrow bridge just below the park entrance. Mitchell said he watched the bird for at least 15 minutes at very close range. He described it as having a brilliant crimson head, black wings with 2 faint wing bars, black tail and back, dark bill, and a bright yellow throat, belly and flanks.

April 18: Ruth Beck reports: Scarlet Tanager singing.

April 19: Bill Snyder who lives on Powhatan Creek called Bill Holcombe today to report watching an Osprey and a Great Egret on the creek and to say that the Canada Geese that he was feeding in the creek now come up to the house and squawk and honk until he throws a couple of handfuls of corn on the ground. The Mute Swans have disappeared and he guesses that they are nesting. He also reported that he was feeding the swans and the geese a few weeks ago when a pair of Mallards joined in. He was throwing corn into the creek. The creek there is too deep for the Mallards to reach corn on the bottom, but they actually disappeared in dives to retrieve the corn, something that Bill had never seen before.

Ruth Beck reports: Summer Tanager in the trees plus Acadian Flycatcher and Eastern Wood Pewee.

April 19: Dorothy Whitfield reports a humming-

bird on the columbine in her yard. Last year her first sighting was April 23. She also reports a beautiful male Eastern Bluebird on her nest box.

April 20: Tom McCary reports Bobwhite Quail at Shirley Plantation.

April 21: Ruth Beck reports: Rose-breasted Grosbeak, male, singing in trees above feeder.

April 22: Tom Armour reports: Today at Treasure Island Road I had my first Blue Grosbeak and this evening Jeanne and I heard a Chuck-will's-widow at the same location.

April 24: Bill Holcombe reports: In Graylin Woods, I heard my first Wood Thrush and saw my first Ovenbird for the year; Tom McCary reports seeing an Orchard Oriole and Blue Grosbeak at Shirley Plantation.

April 25: Tom McCary reports he has seen White-crowned Sparrows at Shirley Plantation throughout April and as late as today.

April 25: Joe and Grace Doyle report from Camp Peary that they saw 62 species this date with these highlights: four American Woodcocks in the middle of the road; first Snowy Egrets in a couple of years; Red-headed Woodpeckers in three separate areas; American Kestrel, Great Egrets, Scarlet Tanager, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Phoebe, Yellowthroat Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Pine Warbler and Ovenbird. They also reported a small raft of Ruddy Ducks *still* on the York River along with the Wood Duck chicks.

April 27: Alex Minarik reports: I had a Red-headed Woodpecker at my feeder today, a first for my yard since moving here 6 years ago.

April 27: Shirley Devan reports: A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher buzzed my feeder station while we were eating dinner. Paused briefly on a branch and then zoomed away. Also, the nest box in my back yard has at least five Carolina Chickadee nestlings about four days old. Sunday, April 25 the mother was brooding them, and the male was bringing food as fast as he could. Tuesday, one of the adults took seeds from the feeder to the box. I also have a pair of Wood Thrushes chasing each other around the yard.

April 28 & 29: Shirley Devan reports a Gray Catbird in the bushes around the feeders. Seems like these birds used to be as common as Northern Mockingbirds.

NEW MEMBERS

The Club welcomes two new members in April: Elizabeth Long and Faye Hobbs. We look forward to seeing you both at the next meeting. Members – please welcome Elizabeth and Faye at our next event.

BLUEBIRD TRAIL AT YRSP

Bluebirds and Chickadees are nesting in earnest at York River State Park. As of April 28, there were 14 complete nests, 36 eggs in process and five Bluebird nestlings. Three of the nests are Chickadee nests. Box # 5 has Chickadee eggs but the female was sitting tight, refusing to let anyone see how many eggs she has. Nesting is just about at the same pace as last year when there were 35 eggs, 12 complete nests and 7 nestlings at the end of April. Check the Club's web site for updated information in May.

WILD BIRD ANALOGIES

By Beth Morgan

As I watch my backyard birds, I can't help but be reminded of certain groups of people. Here is my simplified version:

Cardinals: Employees of Colonial Williamsburg, dressed neatly and festively, easy to spot.

Mourning doves: Heavyside women at Busch Gardens who stand obliviously on the walkways, while people maneuver around them.

Chickadees: Teenagers who have had too much Diet Coke.

Sparrows: Long-time residents of the area, relatively plain but hard-working, can be found at Ace and Food Lion.

Brown thrashers: Volunteers on highway clean-up who are very focused on their task, despite the traffic going past them.

Tufted titmice: Children in private school, well-behaved, in neatly pressed uniforms.

Grackles: Busloads of tourists, stopping at IHOP and Prime Outlets, pushing and shoving, noisy and rude.

Blue jays: People who talk during movies, tailgate and cut in line at the store. They like to drive big, fancy intimidating cars.

Red-bellied woodpeckers: These beauties are all dressed up for church, wearing big hats and lots of perfume, and obviously want to be noticed.

Robins: Young single males, scoping out the gyms for the hottest babes.

Goldfinches: College students, all dressed in similar low-rise bellbottoms and midriff-exposing tops, traveling in chattering groups.

Downy woodpeckers: Couples who have been together a long time and relate to each other in a faithful but unassuming manner.