



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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October 2004

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Alex Minarik

I just returned from a three-week vacation to eight national parks and monuments in South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado. Although the focus of the trip was not birding, my binoculars were always around my neck and I tallied 82 species, 9 of which were life birds. The only bird that I targeted was the white-tailed ptarmigan, an uncommon resident of the alpine tundra regions of Rocky Mountain National Park. Following the directions to a good place to find the birds, Mike and I searched the treeless slopes until snow and thunder made us turn back. Then Mike spied a "moving rock" among all the other rocks and low vegetation just 20 feet from the place we had passed by ten minutes before. We froze in our tracks as the bird began foraging. Then two other "rocks" began to move, too. What exquisite camouflage! I walked six feet ahead to get a different vantage point and then had to search to find the birds, which were right there in front of me. We alerted two birders from Florida to our find and the four of us got eyefuls until the approaching thunderstorm sent us hurrying back to our cars.

NEXT MEETING IS OCTOBER 20

"Creating Backyard Bird Habitats" will be the topic of our October meeting. Plan to join us Wednesday, October 20, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 at Millington Hall at William and Mary. Lou Verner, Wildlife Mapping Coordinator in the Watchable Wildlife Program at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, will present the program. Mr. Verner has a Ph.D. in ecology and was an Urban Wildlife Biologist in Texas before moving to Virginia. Plan to join us to learn the tricks of the trade for making your estate more bird friendly.

OCTOBER 23 FIELD TRIP

The September field trip to the Eastern Shore was rained out thanks to Hurricane Ivan, so we'll plan

again Saturday, October 23, to travel to Kiptopeke State Park on the Eastern Shore. 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 Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands are open, we'll stop by there as well. This is a full day of great birding!

Car pooling is very important for this destination (considering the \$12 toll each way)! 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. If you are a driver, note that there is a lower toll for a CBBT round trip within 24 hours – so be sure to tell the toll taker that you'll be returning the same day so you can qualify for the lower round trip toll.

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 October 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 holiday gifts for your birding friends.

GET WELL WISH FOR MARILYN ZEIGLER

Former WBC Board Member and avid club supporter and birder Marilyn Zeigler is recuperating at her daughter's home after an auto accident in mid-September. The club wishes the speediest recovery to Marilyn and looks forward to seeing her at meetings and field trips soon. If you wish to send a card, mail it to Marilyn at her home address: 107 National Lane, Williamsburg, VA

23185. Relatives are picking up her mail and getting it to her so she'll receive your card promptly. Get better soon, Marilyn!

SEPTEMBER 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!

September 1: Bill Williams reports: "Mitchell Byrd and I found Craney Island to be full of birds during our all too brief visit there this afternoon. We found no "grasspipers," unfortunately. Noteworthy, however, were (at 3:00 p.m.): Northern Shoveler-10-12 Green-winged Teal- at least one, Blue-winged Teal-6-8, Northern Harrier-1 adult male, American Avocet-8-off first cross-dike road, Red Knot-1 basic plumaged adult-southwest corner, Red-necked Phalarope-2-off first cross-dike road, Wilson's Phalarope-1-off first cross-dike road, Gull-billed Tern-2 +, Caspian Tern-ca 400, Royal Tern, Forster's Tern Black Tern-1-southwest corner.

Additional shorebirds included: Killdeer, Semipalmated Plover, both Yellowlegs, Ruddy Turnstone (2), Sanderling (10-12), Short-billed Dowitcher (100+), Willet (2 Western), numerous Least, Semipalmated, Western, Pectoral Sandpipers, 1 White-rumped Sandpiper.

September 1: Opening Day at Kiptopeke Hawkwatch! There was a flight of 127 raptors today not including Vultures. The flight was made up of mostly American Kestrels and some high-flying Ospreys. There was also a great Passerine flight early in the morning. Two Eagles were observed showing migratory behavior (a juvenile and a Basic 4). All this seemed to be fueled by our first day of consistent Northeasterly winds. Here are the numbers: Osprey: 25, Bald Eagle: 2, Northern Harrier: 9, Sharp-Shinned Hawk: 1, Cooper's Hawk: 7, Broad-Winged Hawk: 10, Red-Tailed Hawk: 2, American Kestrel: 70, Un-ID Accipiter: 1. Also of note was the first capture for our raptor banding program. A Hatch-year female Cooper's Hawk was roped in by CVWO's very own Zach Smith.

September 2: at 10:42 a.m. this morning a Sandhill Crane was observed from the Kiptopeke Hawkwatch site. The Crane was soaring with other raptors and vultures in the sky. Hawk watchers observed the bird for around 5 minutes as it moved westward across the horizon and then back out on a north-northeasterly path. The entire time it remained in view it was about as far away as you could see without your binoculars.

September 5: Eleanor Young reports 27 species from the regular 7:00 – 9:00 a.m. bird walk in

Newport News Park. Highlights include a Black and White Warbler, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Hairy Woodpecker, Red-headed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hermit Thrush, and Bald Eagles.

September 5: Jeanne and Gil Frey report: Two weeks ago, 2 Prothonotary Warblers made a brief appearance. About a week later, two Black-throated Blue Warblers, today a Yellow-throated. Most hummingbirds gone, 2 or 3 still feeding. Had a gorgeous Red-tailed Hawk fly in about 25 ft. from ravine deck. He paused for observance and then flew down into the marsh. We're off to Pacific Northwest, so hope to see some western wings!!

Sept 6 – 8: Dan Cristol reports: I just completed three consecutive days of ornithology class field trips to Craney Island Landfill and here's a summary of what we saw (Monday-Wednesday, Sept 6-8):

Raptors: resident Red-tailed Hawks, a few passing Ospreys, a Cooper's Hawk and Merlin hunting birds in the cells on 9/8.

Ducks: A big influx of Northern Shovelers (200-300) on 7 September, and the same 10-20 Black Ducks, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal that have been present for weeks. On the 7th a very early and very nervous female Lesser Scaup put in an appearance in the river half way out the western perimeter road.

Hérons: 5 Great Herons and Snowy Egrets, 3 young Yellow-crowned Night-Hérons and 1 immature Great Blue Heron around the entrance every day, plus single adult Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron and Green Heron in the same area or along the western perimeter jetties.

Terns: 100-150 Caspian Terns and 50 Royal Terns roosting along the western perimeter, joined on various days by 7 basic plumaged Forster's Terns, a Gull-billed Tern still feeding two young, an adult Sandwich Tern with one young and some Common Terns still in decent breeding fettle.

Shorebirds: These really put on a great show for the students, as the feeding is furious and the birds are allowing very close study despite the size of my classes (14 students in each lab section who love to slam doors, knock over scopes and gesticulate wildly.) Today we saw a single Whimbrel and Marbled Godwit circling together and calling, putting on a great display from every angle, but never landing. Over the three days numbers were stable with approximately 3000 peeps (with at least 1000 of these being Least Sandpipers right now, but also a half dozen White-Rump Sandpipers still hanging in there and enough very compliant Westerns and Semipalmated Sandpipers for wonderful mixed scopefuls for the students); 500 Lesser

Yellowlegs, 50 Greater Yellowlegs, 10 Willets, 25 Dowitchers with only short-billed confirmed, still 10-20 Stilt Sandpipers, 25 Pectoral Sandpipers, 5 Ruddy Turnstones, 10 Sanderlings, 1 Red Knot, 2 Black-bellied Plovers, 25-50 Semipalmated Plovers, and 2 Spotted Sandpiper and the requisite Killdeer. Diversity is down a little from August, but the numbers and amount of active feeding are still very impressive given how generally foul and toxic the place looks right now, the huge amount of truck traffic, and the fact that one cell is too deep for sandpipers and one is dry and vegetated. I searched hard for the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper reported last week but that area is all dried up.

September 12: Bill Williams reports: "On the Green Springs Trail I had 25 Veerys flyover predawn. Also present was a hatch year Little Blue Heron (for the second Sunday in a row)."

September 16: Tom McCary reports from his hike around the Lake Matoaka Trail that he found three warblers – a Black and White, a Black-throated Blue Warbler and a female American Redstart. He also observed two Wood Thrushes – one feeding another – most likely adult and first year bird.

September 18: Bill Williams reports: "Ned Brinkley's heads-up about a Long-tailed Jaeger at Craney Island Saturday referenced what was a stunning surprise for the Birding Tribe of the College of William and Mary's Kiptopeke Challenge team. The bird was spotted by Dan Cristol at 1205 EST at the east corner of the southern-most cross dike. It was an adult. The bird flew from the south to the northeast and was last seen flying towards the Hampton Roads harbor. It did not pause or linger at all while we observed it with bins and scope. Write-ups will be posted with VARCOM. At best the birding conditions were deplorable with steady rain, a stiff wind and a lifetime supply of mosquitoes."

September 19: Tom Armour reports an American Redstart in his yard and yesterday was the last day for his hummingbirds.

September 19: Ruth Beck reports a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak in her yard – a wonderful highlight – along with the "usual" warblers and fall migrants.

September 20: Tom McCary reports a female American Redstart in his backyard. He got great looks at her as she moved up and down from the hedge to the gravel driveway and ended up only about three feet from him.

September 20: Bill Williams reports: "After a great deal of effort at several usually reliable locations, I finally "clapped" a sound response from a Sora this afternoon from a spot off

Gordon's Creek, a tributary of the Chickahominy River. Interestingly there was only one, possibly two. In years past at this time of year such sites have produced responses from up to dozens of Sora. I received in the mail today a photograph of an adult male Painted Bunting at a feeder in First Colony taken on or about 24 April 2004. Mr. Richard Joosten took the photos but was unsure of the exact date he had the bird. Great record, nevertheless, and constitutes at least the eighth one for this species for Williamsburg."

September 21: Tom McCary reports a Cattle Egret in the horse pasture at Shirley Plantation in Charles City County.

Sept. 29: Bill Holcombe: "I listened to two Barred Owls exchanging hoots at about 4:45 p.m. in back of Graylin Woods."

Sept. 30: Bill Holcombe reports: "Tom Miller was shocked at breakfast time to see two mature Bald Eagles in his backyard at Kingsmill. One was in a tree and the other on the ground but he could not make out what it was doing there. Mid September he had a usual-for-this-time-of-year flock of European Starlings but they were very particular ones, eating acorns only from his Red Oak trees. Later he observed that same thing at his daughter's home nearby."

October 1: Ruth Beck reports the last sighting of a hummingbird at her feeders.

October 3: Tom McCary reports Barred Owl grooming himself in a tree on the Lake Matoaka Fitness Trail.

October 3: Tom Armour reports a male Black-throated Blue Warbler in his yard.

October 3: Bill Williams reports: "On the Greensprings Trail Sunday there were some neat highlight birds including Merlin, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Wood and Swainson's thrushes, Philadelphia Vireo, Northern Parula, Scarlet Tanager, a lingering Indigo Bunting and the season's first Swamp Sparrow. American Robins were numerous."

LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS VISIT KIPTOPEKE

By Bill Williams

For the 14th consecutive year students from Lafayette High School's Field Biology class were able to immerse themselves in the bird banding and hawk migration studies conducted at Kiptopeke State Park on the Eastern Shore. On Friday, October 1, some 36 of Hugh Beard's students got to experience song birds and raptors as up close and personal as it gets. They watched as birds were removed from mist nets, banded, measured, and released. They learned why the studies are

conducted and the conservation significance of the data that are being gathered. Several students spent time in the raptor trapping blind and all of the students were exposed to a spectacular hawk and falcon migration, as well as the esoteric banter of the bird-brain people who make it an annual pilgrimage to be at Kiptopeke the first week of October. Most exciting was the capture of a magnificent Virginia Rail, which thrilled everyone, especially those who have searched for years just to get a brief glimpse of one.

FREYS' WEST COAST TRIP

By Jeanne & Gil Frey

[Sept 30, 2004] Reporting from our recent trip to Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver, we saw our first Oregon Junco and the dramatic Stellar Jay. Ravens were noted at the higher elevations and, of course, many gulls of the ringbilled family. Judging from location, I would assume them to be California gulls. Back at home the farmer has just cut the cornfields, so we're seeing a lot more American Kestrels and Red-tailed Hawks. The feeders are relatively quiet except for Chickadees, Juncos and Nuthatches. It looks to me like the American Crow is doing well everywhere. We have some very intelligent ones who now are permanent neighbors. They have a 24 hr sentry atop a power pole at the entrance to our property.

CONSERVATION CORNER

By Dan Cristol

The passage of Hurricane Ivan made the Kiptopeke Challenge all the more challenging. Bill Williams, graduate student Ariel White and I (The William and Mary Feathered Tribe, one of 12 teams competing) got out at 4 as planned, and heard migrating Swainson's Thrush and Veery and Barred Owl right on schedule behind Jamestown High School. But heavy rain and wind attacked us at 5 a.m. as we worked Bill Williams' favorite woods at Greensprings Nature Trail for what was left of the dawn chorus, a few lingering territorial birds such as Red-headed Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, Indigo Bunting, Blue Grosbeak and Wood Duck. Our first sign that the storm crushing down on us would bring interesting birds was a Short-billed Dowitcher that circled the high school football field calling persistently at a flock of Killdeer...a fortuitous sighting, as we never got close to a Dowitcher the rest of the day. We headed to Craney Island, but not before stopping at the Rawl's Byrd Elementary School parking lot to pick up House Sparrow and bumping into two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in the small trees at the

edge of the lot. By then we knew the nasty weather had a silver lining. Next stop was Craney, where the relatively clear skies instantly turned to a heavy gale before we could even get out of the car. Shorebirds had thinned out considerably since the club trip in late August, but the same Hudsonian Godwit and Wilson's Phalarope were still around, along with a half-dozen White-rumped Sandpipers.

Two Golden with three Black-bellied Plover were a treat at the grassy verge where we saw Upland Sandpiper on the club trip. Four Lesser Black-backed Gulls (3 adults) were another bonus. But the biggest thrill came at noon when a nicely marked adult Long-tailed Jaeger flew lazily up the eastern edge of the dike while we searched the peeps and headed up the James after giving us a quick glance. The observation was brief but spectacular and almost made up for the pelting horizontal rain and gale force winds hitting our backs. With new enthusiasm we headed for the Eastern Shore and managed to put together a decent raptor list, add Tricolored and Little Blue Heron, and even pick up a Eurasian Collared Dove near the usual spot as it blasted off the road shoulder, at the only angle that would have allowed our third teammate to witness the event (all three team members need to see 95% of the birds according to the rules of the Challenge,) before the soaked alien disappeared into the pelting rain and wind that had followed us to the Shore. After realizing that our competitors had enjoyed a largely rain-free morning on the Shore as the storm tracked our movement like a shadow, we were pleased to snag a Marbled Godwit and Whimbrel at Oyster to round out the shorebird list. The day ended with our 124th species, a fleeting but fabulous Peregrine Falcon winging after some poor shorebird at Custis Tomb. Number 125, a Yellow Warbler, propelled sideways by the wind between Bill and me as we walked single file, could not be relocated to be counted by the other team members, perhaps because it had been blown to pieces.

As it turns out, we beat out the competition by one bird and won the Challenge. Next year I hope William & Mary can have two teams, one of students in my ornithology class, and the Williamsburg Bird Club simply must put together a team. It was loads of fun and we raised money for CVWO. Anyone who wants to sponsor our winning effort belatedly to support the bird research/education run by CVWO at Kiptopeke should contact Bill Williams (221-7741) at the Center for Conservation Biology.

FROG EATS BIRD

By Tony Dion

When we moved here in early 2000, one of the things we liked was that our ½-acre was basically empty. We undertook to fill it up, and one of the things we put in is a 2,700 gallon pond/water feature with a waterfall. We initially stocked it with 10 fancy goldfish that have multiplied to around 100. Local frogs also found us and we have a thriving community of bullfrogs, toads and tree frogs, which serenade us in the warmer weather and multiply and go forth each spring. In the back yard and around the pond are four bird feeders that are kept cleaned and full most of the year. We have had many hours of pleasant bird watching from our living room. Because of the water and waterfall, all the birds in the area make a beeline for our pond. Over the years I have netted 5-6 young dead sparrows that probably tried to land on a lily pad, fell in, and didn't know how to get out.

The frogs are excellent hunters of dragonflies and sometime butterflies. We'll see the wing remains floating on the pond. Also, the bullfrogs sit below our butterfly bush and wait for the butterflies to arrive. I've seen the bullfrogs jump 3 to 3-1/2 feet straight up after a butterfly. They miss, mostly because they have a habit of croaking just before they leap, and I assume the butterflies hear the croak and take flight. However, there are no skinny bullfrogs in our pond.

A week ago I thought I saw a bullfrog on the far side of the pond with what appeared to be a bird in its mouth! Being a bit unbelieving I got my binoculars, and sure enough, from the back of the frog I could see bird legs and feet coming out of the right side of its mouth, and tail feathers out of the left side of its mouth. I got my wife Chris and she looked through the binoculars and saw the same thing.

I watched this frog for over 30 minutes sitting on the side of the pond with a mouthful of bird. It moved about a bit, turning this way and that, facing full front on occasion so I could verify the bird in its mouth. If you can picture a bullfrog with a bird in its mouth, you'll agree he had a good job keeping his mouth closed!

I moved over to where the frog was, got to within 3-4 feet, and then the frog jumped into the water with the bird still in its mouth. I waited awhile, hoping that the frog would have to let go to breathe, but I think they can slow down their need to breathe when necessary, and I was wasting my time.

I went back into the house and kept an eye on the pond for developments, but I didn't see the frog any more that day. About two days later I noticed

10-12 sparrow feathers floating on the pond, and assumed that the frog had made a meal of the bird.

BIRDS AT CAMP PEARY

Grace and Joe Doyle birded Camp Peary three Sundays in September and reported a high count of 44 species on September 5. Here are the highlights of their observations:

These species were seen all three dates: Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Canada Goose, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Laughing Gull, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, Pine Warbler, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch.

Additional species seen September 5: Black Vulture, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Clapper Rail, Common Tern, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Common Yellowthroat, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird, House Finch.

Additional species seen September 19: Double-crested Cormorant, Tri-colored Heron, Mute Swan, Red-tailed Hawk, Common Tern, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Kingbird, White-eyed Vireo, Dark-eyed Junco, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird.

Additional species seen September 26: Double-crested Cormorant, Tri-colored Heron, Mute Swan, Black Vulture, Osprey, Clapper Rail, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Fish Crow, White-breasted Nuthatch, Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee, Common Grackle.

The Doyle's regular visits to Camp Peary provide an ongoing record of birds at Camp Peary and are vital to the collection of bird population data in the Williamsburg area. Thanks go to Grace and Joe for sharing their weekly trips.

KIPTOPEKE CHALLENGE SUMMARY

By Kurt Gaskill, KC 2004 Coordinator

On behalf of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, let me extend a well-deserved congratulations to THE BIRDING TRIBE for capturing first place in last Saturday's Kiptopeke

Challenge! The Tribe was lead by Bill Williams, with Dan Cristol and Ariel White. Saturday was a trying day for all teams and I believe all participants deserve applause for an outstanding job! Here are the results that I have as of this writing:

The Birding Tribe, 124 species
The Wandering Siskins, 123
VSO Roving Ravens, 116
Tequila Mockingbirds, 113
Laughing Falcons, 102
Wild Birds Unlimited Williamsburg, 102
Dirty Dickcissels, 95
Jerry's Fledglings, 85 (VSO Chincoteague Field Trip)
Team Zucaritas, 81 (youth entry)
MAD-BAD Birders 80 (Special Venue and etc; 47 on Fisherman Is) Wayward First Landing Loons 44 (ESVNR Special Venue) Platform Poachers aka Team Surfbird 39

If you have not already done so, please send your team your donation. Thank you.

Based upon the tally lists I have been given, the 10th Kiptopeke Challenge teams observed 160 Eastern Shore species with several additional Craney Island additions! This is slightly above the average of 155 for the last 9 years. Comparing to previous KC's, the following are interesting and somewhat unusual species observed during the KC Saturday, September 18, 2004.

White Ibis (always a favorite, ramp road ESVNR), Snow Goose (present for a few days at Chincoteague NWR), Black Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser (CNWR), King Rail (ramp road), American Golden Plover (Arlington Rd area), Hudsonian Godwit (Chincoteague causeway), Marbled Godwit, Red Knot (CNWR), Dunlin (CNWR), Long-billed Dowitcher (Chincoteague causeway), Sandwich Tern (CNWR), Black Tern (?), Eurasian Collared-Dove (the usual spot near KSP, up to 3 were noted!), Yellow-throated Vireo (not often found this late), Cliff Swallow (ditto), Nashville Warbler (always great to see), Blackburnian Warbler (ditto), Blackpoll Warbler (they're coming!), Worm-eating (not often found this late), and Summer Tanager.

I got a few scattered reports of interesting birds before the event that have not been generally reported (unlike the White-tailed Kite): American Bittern (Ramp Rd), Gull-billed Tern (CBBT), Yellow-throated Warbler (Route 600), Cape May Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Vesper Sparrow (Kiptopeke SP) and Grasshopper Sparrow (near Wallops Island).

The award ceremony is Friday, October 8 at the Eastern Shore Birding Festival. ALL teams

receive prizes and each team gets two minutes to tell a short story about its day.

VSO FALL FIELD TRIP TO CHINCOTEAGUE SEPT. 17 – 19

By Shirley Devan

Hurricane Ivan chose the wrong weekend to breeze through Virginia September 18 and 19. All week I checked The Weather Channel and internet weather station forecasts. Where was he going, and when? Should we cancel our trip? Would the VSO cancel the weekend? I called the hotel every day from Wednesday to Friday. I called my traveling partner, Dorothy Whitfield, several times. Should we go? What should we be prepared for if we did go? I decided to buy a rain suit. It was appropriately labeled "Hurricane Suit."

As you've guessed by now, we ventured forth, despite the forecast for rain and wind. Dorothy Whitfield and I drove to the Eastern Shore Friday afternoon, September 17, where the weather was sunny but windy when we stopped at Kiptopeke about 1:30 p.m. The wind was out of the east and there was not much activity there at that time – a few Merlins flying over. The songbird banding station had closed for the day and that was disappointing.

We dropped in at the Visitor Center of the Eastern Shore NWR for a few minutes. Looking out the observation room in the back we spotted a female Blue Grosbeak in grass just in front of the window. Otherwise, nothing.

When we arrived at the field trip headquarters at the Refuge Inn in Chincoteague we learned that the Sunday field trips and boat trips had been cancelled and the leaders had moved everyone to the Saturday expeditions. Lots of people canceled their plans to make the trip and the weather for Sunday was unpredictable, so the trip leaders decided to concentrate on Saturday activities.

The weekend started with a slide show Friday evening at the new Visitor Center at Chincoteague NWR. Linda Scherer, a WBC member who came to the Field Trip weekend on her own, was at the evening session, and Dorothy and Linda and I made plans to meet for breakfast Saturday morning before the boat trip. We were happy to see another Williamsburg birder and found out Linda's hotel room was next to ours.

The good news about the boat was that it rode the waves very well and had benches. The bad news was that it had no roof. About 16 people boarded the boat, just about all in rain suits. It rained for a few minutes early on, then stopped. It was a bit windy (kept the mosquitoes away!) and we had a great 2 ½ hour trip. Jerry Via and Michael Beck

led our cruise. No unexpected birds but we got great views of oystercatchers, herons, egrets, plus several Tri-colored herons. The water was very high because of high tide and because of the storm surge caused by Hurricane Ivan. Storm surge kept the water in the creeks and bays, so no mud flats were exposed to attract the little shorebirds.

The planned afternoon bus trip to the Marsh Flats area of the island took off as planned with a bus full of eager participants and lots of equipment. Good thing we had the school bus because it rained just about all afternoon! Bird watching from the bus windows with scopes and binoculars was a challenge sometimes because the wind was blowing rain sideways into the bus! We did see Glossy Ibis (quite a few), one American Avocet, about a dozen Northern Bobwhite (they received the loudest round of applause), Cattle Egrets (or more locally known as “pony egrets” because they were perched on the wild ponies), and the usual shore birds – yellowlegs, willets, egrets, herons. We were able to see a Semipalmated plover and a Semipalmated Sandpiper in the same view to better learn the difference. We were able to spot a Peregrine Falcon perched on the falcon nest stand on the far side of the island.

While one group was on the morning boat trip, another group ventured out on the Saturday morning Warbler Walk on the National Wildlife Refuge’s Woodland Trail. Leader Bill Akers reported seeing/hearing not a single warbler. They renamed it the “Flicker Walk.” They were planning to do the Warbler/Flicker walk again Sunday morning and I expect they had a better warbler count.

Saturday evening’s tally only came to 85 species – mainly because of the missing warblers and other small birds. The weather was just was just too windy for those little birds. Last year’s tally for the full weekend was over 130. The group was officially registered in the Kiptopeke Challenge and raised over \$100 over the weekend to support the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory.

Before returning home Sunday, Dorothy and I visited the beach road on Assateague and got very good close-up looks at dozens of Black Skimmers. Even though much of the hurricane had passed to the west overnight, the wind and the surf were still awesome with impressive waves almost washing over the dunes to the parking area.

We also visited the brand spanking new Visitor Center at Chincoteague NWR. Much larger than the previous center, it just opened last October and still smells new! I highly recommend a visit to this spectacular facility located just down the road about ¼ mile from the old one.

As Dorothy Whitfield said, “We turned lemons into lemonade,” and had a great birding adventure

despite the weather! Glad we connected with Linda Scherer, who volunteered to transport us to the various loading points Saturday. We three enjoyed a relaxing dinner Saturday night at AJ’s. Jerry Via and Bill Akers, the leaders, were entertaining, helpful and friendly. And given the weather, all participants earned their badges as “hard core birders.”

The VSO sponsors this trip every September. Thanks to all at the VSO who planned and then replanned the weekend on short notice. Plan to go next year for a fun, learning weekend.