



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Bob Long

One of the great things about the Williamsburg Bird Club is sharing information about birds and backyard feeders. Our feeders here at the house supply peanuts, sunflower, safflower and thistle seed plus three different types of suet. More than twenty species seek nourishment daily. It's fun to sit comfortably inside and watch nuthatch parents dealing with their young, while a Pileated Woodpecker wraps himself around the peanut feeder chipping away for five or ten minutes.

Perhaps birders aren't that different from the birds as we gather together seeking nourishment for body and mind. Barb Streb and her refreshment committee are to be commended for their outstanding efforts in satisfying birder palates. Program chairman Tom McCary always provides nourishment for birder minds with outstanding programs. Bill Williams' "Backyard Birds and Birding" presentation attracted more than seventy bird lovers to the Williamsburg Library in May. Bird talks, bird walks, nature camp, our annual picnic, the Flyer, and our fabulous web site – Williamsburg Bird Club is "where it's happening."

SUMMER BIRD WALKS 4th SATURDAYS

During June, July, and August, the New Quarter Park Bird Walks will be on the 4th Saturdays only – June 24, July 22, and August 26. Meet in the parking lot at 7:00 a.m. The scheduled leader is Bill Williams. Wear a hat and bring bug spray. The walk will likely be over by 9:00 a.m. when the heat index starts to rise and the birds head for cover! If you need directions, call the park at 890-3513.

NEXT FIELD TRIP AUGUST 19 TO CRANEY ISLAND

Our next field trip will be in August when Ruth

Beck leads us to Craney Island Saturday, August 19. Save the date and look for more details in the August newsletter. Our next meeting and program will be the third Wednesday in September – September 20. Your editors take a summer break – no July newsletter. Look for the August newsletter the first week in the month.

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

This spring the Williamsburg Bird Club awarded three \$500 William Sheehan Ornithology Research Grants to biology graduate students at William and Mary. The recipients and their projects are: Anne Condon – "Examination of mercury levels in fledgling birds along contaminated portions of the South and Shenandoah Rivers in Virginia"; Rebecka Brasso – "The effects of mercury contamination on the nesting success of tree swallows"; Caitlin Kight – "The effects of human disturbance on the breeding success of cavity nesting species."

Congratulations to all three recipients. We look forward to hearing about their research results at our club programs in the 2006 – 2007 academic year.

MAY 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!

May 1: Bill Holcombe reports: "While dog walking I came face to face with a Blackpoll Warbler and an Ovenbird in the same bush – Ovenbird fled, Blackpoll flitted about the bush for minute or two."

May 5: Alex Minarik reports: "This morning I saw 2 Magnolia Warblers and a Common Yellowthroat in my yard. These make a total of 66 yard birds for the year so far!"

May 5: Tom Armour reports: "this PM at the end of Treasure Island Road, one Yellow-breasted

CHAT, 1 White-eyed Vireo, 1 Common Yellowthroat, and 1 Yellow Warbler.”

May 5: Sara Lewis reports from her kayaking expedition on Queens Creek with Molly Nealer of New Quarter Park: Molly and I spent a wonderful morning kayaking on Queen's Creek and wanted to submit our list: Osprey - 8 to 10, Great Blue Heron - 6 or 7, Great Egret - about 6, Double-crested Cormorant – 1, Canada Goose – 2, Yellowlegs (?) - 3 or 4, Sandpiper (?) - 3 or 4, Red-winged Blackbird - 2 or 3, Gulls - 10ish, Barn Swallow - 2 or maybe the same one twice (very pretty!), sparrow (species) – 1.

May 5: Shirley Devan reports 24 species at York River State Park. The highlights were a Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Buntings, Eastern Meadowlark, and Orchard Oriole.

May 7: Tom Armour reports: This morning at Treasure Island Road I had 1 Eastern Kingbird, 1 Yellow-breasted Chat, 1 Eastern Meadowlark, 1 Indigo Bunting, and 1 Field Sparrow.

May 7: Eleanor Young reports from the regular first Sunday bird walk at Newport News Park (sponsored by the Hampton Roads Bird Club): Highlights included Northern Parula (star of the day), Osprey, Rough-winged Swallows, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Red-tailed Hawk, Eastern Bluebirds, American Goldfinches, Great Blue Herons, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Chipping Sparrows.

May 8: Bill Holcombe reports: “Delighted to find a Rose-breasted Grosbeak hanging around my seed feeder and from time to time treating us with that beautiful song that Peterson calls, “Like a Robin with voice lessons.”

May 9: Shirley Devan has 2 Eastern Bluebirds at her feeder. They must be nesting in the neighborhood somewhere because they are not in the nest box nearby.

May 9: Bill Williams reports: Across from Drummond's Field on Mainland Farm today there was a Horned Lark. At College Creek today Tom Armour, Brian Taber and I had at least 2 Peregrine Falcons and 2 Least Terns. Later Brian and I had a Merlin.

May 10: Bill Williams reports: From the College Creek Hawk Watch this morning I picked up 2 birds over Hog Island flying in our direction across the James River which were soon identified as Sandhill Cranes. Brian Taber and I watched them cross the river over Kingsmill. Fred arrived in time to see them well as they turned northeast, heading over Williamsburg. This is our first local record for this species!

May 11: Marilyn Zeigler reports a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak at her feeder.

May 12: Bill Williams reports that Fred Blystone and he saw a Bonaparte's Gull at College Creek.

May 16: Alex Minarik reports a Veery at Bassett Hall trail and on May 17 a Swainson's Thrush at York River State Park.

May 17: Tom Armour reports: “Today I had a Spotted Sandpiper in the marsh at the end of Treasure island Road, the first one there this year.”

May 17: Bill Williams reports: “Two Black-bellied Plovers and 1 Least Tern were seen at College Creek by Brian Taber and me.”

May 18: Bill Williams reports: “Three Snowy Egrets were in the fresh water pool across from the Archer's Hope pull-off of the Jamestown end of the Colonial Parkway.”

May 18: Tom Armour reports: “This morning I had a Cattle Egret feeding with the Cows at the farm on Treasure Island Road, the 1st one this year. Also saw a hen Wood Duck with 2 small young. This PM on Treasure Island Road 1 Blue Grosbeak, 1 Orchard Oriole and in the marsh 2 Snowy Egrets, 1st Snowys for me this year.”

May 18: Chuck Rend reports: “We saw Blackpoll Warblers in our backyard. They arrived right on schedule as they do every year at this time.”

May 21: Alex Minarik reports a Swainson's thrush at Waller Mill Park.

May 20: Bill Williams reports: “Brian Taber and I saw Two Glossy Ibis and 8 Black-bellied Plovers off College Creek.”

May 21: Bill Williams reports: At College Creek, Fred Blystone, Brian Taber and I saw 19 Whimbrel and 1 Bonaparte's Gull. The Whimbrel circled over the James River several times, eventually heading for Hog Island.

May 21: Alex Minarik reports: From my deck, I observed an adult Barred Owl and two owlets. The owlets were hopping from branch to branch, walking along branches and stretching their wings. They made a high pitched eeeeeee sound.

May 21: Shirley Devan spotted a first year male Orchard Oriole in a tree over the footbridge at Jamestown Island after touring the new Archearium (a wonderful exhibit!).

May 22: Tom Armour reports: “This morning in the pool at the end of Treasure Island Road the tide was out and saw 17 Semipalmated Sandpipers, 2 Least Sandpipers, 1 Western Sandpiper, 1 Spotted Sandpiper, 1 Pectoral Sandpiper, and 1 Semipalmated Plover.”

May 23: Tom Armour reports: “A BOBWHITE flew right across the road right in front of me this morning. It looked like a female – haven't heard one this year and didn't see one last year!”

May 23: Alex Minarik submits this report from a morning trek around York River State Park: "Walked the Backbone trail, the Pumunkey trail and the Majestic Oak trail this a.m. at York River State Park. Highlights were 11 warbler species, at least 5 Scarlet Tanagers, and three Swainson's thrushes. The warblers were as follows: yellow, yellow-throated, common yellowthroat, black and white, blackpoll, pine, ovenbird, redstart, CANADA, BLACK-THROATED GREEN and hooded."

May 25: Grace Doyle called to report the latest close encounters with their neighborhood Red-shouldered Hawks: On Mother's Day weekend, the pair sat on their deck railing facing each other. Later in the week when Grace was potting herbs on her deck, the hawk landed on the railing about 10 feet away for a short time, then took off flying low to the ground. A few days later, one of the hawks flew into a window at their house. Then, on **May 24**, while Grace was working again on the deck, one of the hawks landed on the railing right next to her. Grace commented that she "could have reached right out and touched him." Then he flew away and she could feel the feathers move the air around her face.

May 30: Dorothy Whitfield reports that Red-headed Woodpeckers and Hairy Woodpeckers (plus the usual collection of feeder birds) have been visiting her suet feeders regularly since May 7.

BIRDING AROUND VA

By Fred Blystone

On Saturday, May 20th I joined leader Wendy Ealding and about a dozen other birders for a walk at Dutch Gap Conservation Area in Chesterfield County. It was a very windy day which had an adverse effect on the number of birds we were able to see. There were a total of 49 species seen. The highlights of the walk were a Least Bittern, a Green Heron and very good looks at Blue Grosbeaks. I did not see the Least Bittern but on the way back I had the good fortune to see a Peregrine Falcon fly off the Benjamin Harrison Bridge. On Sunday, May 21st Eleanor Young and I joined Jane Frigo and four other birders for the walk held in Newport News Park by the Hampton Roads Bird Club. There were a total of 49 species seen. The highlight for me was very good looks at at least 5 Blackpoll Warblers. Other good sightings were a Green Heron, an Orchard Oriole, a Spotted Sandpiper, Red-headed Woodpeckers, and a number of Prothonotary Warblers.

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to Tracey Detwiler and Linda Hand –

new members in the last month! We look forward to seeing you on upcoming bird walks and field trips this summer.

A CALIFORNIA TREAT

By Bill Holcombe

We made our usual spring trip to my daughter in Carpinteria, a town within the broad Santa Barbara area. The town set aside a natural salt marsh for those interested in the birds and flora there. On my first visit this year, I had four up close views of a hummingbird on a prominent perch, which stayed put for minutes at a time. This was a very distinctive hummingbird. From the rear or side, the head was a sort of bushy black. The back was dark, sort of a slate with a green cast to it. The breast was light to dark grey. The bill was longer and heavier than our Red-throated. The surprise came when I got to look straight into the face. Then the forehead and sides of the head, plus an extension of a sort of mantle to the shoulders, burst into a brilliant red tinged with orange light! (Tom Armour, this was early in the day and I'd had nothing but orange juice to drink!) My copy of the Western Peterson book had three pages of hummingbird pictures with nothing remotely resembling this bird.

My daughter is friendly with a lady who conducts tours of this marsh and I called her and told her my story. She said that she was rather certain of the bird but wanted to check with the local guru. The guru said that I had exactly described the Anna Hummingbird which is rather common in that area.

However, that shocking display of what really looks like bright red light surrounding the bird's face was my greatest birding surprise since seeing the Long-billed Whimbrel on the coast there some years ago. But I don't understand how Roger Tory Peterson, my birding hero, could have painted the bird identified as the Anna in the western book. This bird was a treat but also a puzzle.

VSO ANNUAL MEETING IN MAY

By Fred Blystone

Louise and I were fortunate to be able to join approximately 140 other birders at the VSO Annual Meeting, hosted by the Buchanan County Bird Club at Breaks Interstate Park, which is mostly in Dickinson County, Virginia and Pike County, Kentucky. In addition to green woodlands and mountainous terrain, the park contains the largest canyon east of the Mississippi, five miles long and 1600 feet deep.

The weekend started with an Early Birding trip in the Slate Creek/Compton Mountain/Enoch Branch area that gave participants great looks at the following warblers: Yellow, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Golden-winged, Blue-winged and

Cape May, as well as a Cerulean in addition to many other species.

There was a VSO business meeting Friday evening followed by a video program of the birds of the Breaks. Roger Mayhorn, president of the Buchanan County Bird Club, then presented a Power Point Program about the different trails to be birded with photos of some of the birds likely to be seen.

There were nine walks held on Saturday and the weather could not have been better. Four walks followed these on a very rainy Sunday morning. Saturday evening there was a social hour, then a banquet and a presentation by author Don Kroodsmma (*The Singing Life of Birds*), who played birdsongs and analyzed them using computerized "sonagrams" (also known as sound spectrograms). I was given a new appreciation of those of you who can identify so many birds by their songs. Around 120 species of birds were seen over the weekend, including a total of 29 warbler species. In addition to the birds I listed above, other highlights were Swainson's Warblers, Grass-hopper Sparrows, a Sora Rail, and an American Bittern.

If you ever have the opportunity to visit Breaks Interstate Park, you will not be disappointed. There are cottages for rent by the week, a camp-round, and an 82-room lodge (in seven units) scattered through the woods and on the edge of the gorge (sitting on your patio watching soaring hawks and vultures that are hundreds of feet below you is a whole new way of hawk watching).

BACKYARD HABITAT

By Cynthia Long

Are you lucky enough to have a purple martin habitat? Ours disappeared over the years as nearby trees matured, and ruined the flight path these daring aerobatic swallows need to feed and land. Even the martin houses that stood for years near the Queen's Lake dam have been abandoned. If you are not too far from the water and have an open sunny space, you may be able to entice these lovely birds.

Our favorite viewing place has moved a few miles down the road to Melissa's Meadow on South Henry Street, adjacent to the parking lot by the McCormack/Nagelsen tennis center. This wild-lower meadow was planted in the early 1980's by members of the Virginia Native Plant Society, Master gardeners, and the landscape staff at the College of William and Mary. WBC longtime member Martha Armstrong donated a martin house a few years ago, which was immediately occupied. It is a delight to sit on the bench, admire the abundance of native plants in bloom, and listen to the chortling song of these insect eating birds. Think about your lawn. Save fuel and labor,

convert it to native grass and flowers, plant a martin house in the middle, and spend all that extra free time enjoying the wildlife.

COLLEGE CREEK HAWKWATCH

By Brian Taber

This was the 10th consecutive season of the College Creek Hawkwatch, located on the James River, 3 miles southeast of Williamsburg, sponsored by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. The hawkwatch completed 80 days and 128 hours of observation, from February 8 to May 27. It was the highest number of days and second highest number of hours of coverage. The total of 1525 was also a new season high count. The protocol remained the same as in the previous 9 seasons: a daily watch was conducted, weather permitting, between about 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., Eastern Standard Time. All hawks and vultures crossing the river headed north were tallied.

The biggest days were 92 birds on March 11th, 64 birds on March 17th and 62 birds on March 8th. The number of birds per hour was 12, slightly above the average. The most species on one day was 8, on March 16th, March 28th and April 23rd. The Bald Eagle nest, just west of the site was active again this year. Adult Bald Eagles were regularly seen again over Kingsmill and Hog Island as well. Two Osprey nests were visible on old duck blind structures in the river. The nearest nest blew down for the second consecutive year. Black Vultures set a new season high at 117, thanks to an amazing new daily high count of 50 birds on March 11th. Turkey Vultures, at 915, were the 2nd highest ever, only behind the 947 of the first year of the count, in 1997. Ospreys set a new record at 183. Bald Eagles were the 2nd highest, at 109, reflecting the increased coverage in May, when they seem to move the most and the daily high count for Bald Eagles, 17, was tied on April 23rd.

Northern Harriers were third highest; Sharp-shinned fourth highest; Cooper's tied for second highest; Red-Shouldered tied for fourth highest; Broad-winged Hawks were third highest and the daily high count was only 2 on three different occasions, as flocks of Broad-winged Hawks are not seen at the site; Red-tailed Hawks were fourth highest; American Kestrels, sadly, were at the lowest total ever, despite the increased coverage over every year except 2005; the single Merlin and all 4 Peregrines came within about an hour and a half on May 9th. The previous Peregrine daily high and season high counts were 2. Some non-raptor highlights included a White Pelican on several days in April, circling over Hog Island; 2 Sandhill Cranes which flew over on May 10th, establishing the first record for the Williamsburg area; Least Terns on several

occasions in April and May; Great Egrets; Glossy Ibis; a good assortment of waterfowl including Tundra Swans and two ducks which are uncommon at the site, Northern Pintails and Northern Shovelers. Shorebirds included Black-bellied Plovers, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpipers, Least Sandpipers, and a very unusual local record of 19 Whimbrels on May 21st. We also made an effort to keep track of butterflies that actually crossed the river heading north, recording numbers and species whenever possible.

Many thanks to dedicated regular volunteers Tom Armour, Bill Williams and Fred Blystone for coverage on most days. If you want additional information about species totals and dates, contact me at: Taberzz@aol.com

RESULTS OF SPRING COUNT

By Bill Williams

A final, complete list of species and counts is included in this newsletter. The wind and the cool air coming in from the north served to suppress the counts this year. Clearly there were few migrants around. The total was 135 species.

Write-ins of note include Bufflehead, Gadwall, Hooded Merganser, Broad-winged Hawk, Wilson's Snipe, Sharp-tailed Sparrow species. Of particular interest is the 2,026 Barn Swallows found at Hog Island, part of a large contingent of more than 2,300 swallows including 252 Tree, 35 Northern Rough-winged, 44 Bank Swallows. Thanks to all who participated!