



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 35, No. 8

www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

September 2011

President's Corner



By Shirley Devan

Our Bird Club meetings will be in **Andrews Hall Room 101** this fall. Our usual room in Millington was not available, so we'll be in Andrews Hall, which is actually closer

to the Phi Beta Kappa Parking lot.

We've met in this room several times recently, and there are **lots** of seats. So bring your friends and neighbors and sit near the front. We'll have a sign on the sidewalk beside Andrews Hall to direct you in the side door.

Parking Permit: Enclosed with this newsletter is a parking permit for the nights of the Bird Club meetings. Please place it in your windshield when you park in front of Phi Beta Kappa Hall, the Art Museum, or Morton Hall. You may be subject to an expensive parking ticket from the William and Mary Parking Services without the permit displayed in your windshield.

Many thanks to Dr. Dan Cristol for arranging meeting space and parking permits for our Bird Club this year.

September Meeting

The Williamsburg Bird Club and the Hampton Roads Bird Club have joined forces to "adopt" an Audubon Important Bird Area on the Coastal Plain of VA. The "Western Shore Marshes" stretch from Grandview Beach north to Haven Beach and include portions of the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay in Poquoson, Hampton, Gloucester County, York County and Mathews County.

At the Bird Club's September meeting Ruth Beck and Shirley Devan will describe the areas with photos and maps and discuss the importance of conserving and protecting these areas and the special birds in these habitats. Ruth Beck has been studying the birds at Grandview Nature Preserve and Plum Tree Island for many years, and conducts yearly surveys of nesting shore birds at Grandview.

Our two bird clubs will join forces for future bird surveys and an upcoming "TogetherGreen Volunteer Day" event at one or more of the birding spots in this IBA.

Plan to join us on September 21 at 7:30 PM in **Room 101, Andrews Hall**, on the W&M campus. Cathy Hill and Barbara Streb will be providing the refreshments. **Don't forget to use your parking permit.**

September Field Trip

17 September Trip to Kiptopeke. Like warblers? Vireos? Thrushes maybe? Or are you secretly hoping to see hawks (accipiters and buteos) and falcons in action? Either way, you'll be pleased, and a morning with Susan Powell at the Kiptopeke State Park songbird and hawk banding stations will be a memorable and exciting event! Like Forrest Gump's mom said about the box of chocolates, "You never know what yer gonna get!" What's certain is that the songbird banders will show us warblers and other beautiful songbirds so close, to view and photograph, that we don't need binocs to appreciate their delicate beauty. Kiss "warbler neck" goodbye!

We will learn about the songbird and the hawk banding programs, chat with the experts, and have a chance to learn the latest about fall migration on the Atlantic Flyway.

A short walk away we will see a variety of migrating raptors soaring overhead, then diving at lures which they believe to be an easy meal, and then caught and held in the hand closeup for admiring and photographing! They can include hawks and falcons you have never had a good look at in the wild! On the way to and from the hawkwatch station, a short walk from the songbirds, we will also pass by a beautiful butterfly garden, which is often worth the trip in its own right!

We'll be done before lunchtime, but time permitting at the end of the morning, we will take a quick look at the nearby marsh in the National Wildlife Reserve, to round out the day with some waders and shorebirds. Well, you just can't pack more enjoyment into a morning of birding, and there's no one better to enjoy it with than Susan, who has a "nest" nearby on the Eastern Shore and is a "frequent flyer" to Kiptopeke. Even for those of us who have done this before, each trip brings new and unex-

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Historian **Open**

Summary of Bird Data

The latest version of Bill Williams' *Summary of Local Bird Data through 2009: Williamsburg, James City County, York County, Hog Island WMA, Surry County* can be downloaded from our website.

Wild Birds Unlimited

Don't forget that the WBC receives a 5% rebate on the pre-tax amount our members spend at Wild Birds Unlimited in Monticello Marketplace. You do have to let them know that you are a member.

pected treats. Most of us learn more about migration and the migrant birds on these visits than we could imagine.

For those wishing to carpool, departure will be from Colony Square shopping center at 0700 on Saturday, 17 September. If you wish to meet us there, please meet us in the parking lot at Kiptopeke State Park at 0800 hours. The park is on the Bay side (port side, left side for landlubbers) of Rte 13 North, about a mile after the toll booths on the Eastern Shore side of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. For any questions please call Geoff Giles at 757-645-8716. Hope to see you there!

August Bird Sightings

Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Fred Blystone at 229-4346 or fmb19481@verizon.net. If you encounter interesting birds on your vacation/travels, please share!

August 1: While walking the entire Greensprings Nature Trail, Shirley Devan recorded 20 species—the best being a Little Blue Heron. She said the next best were two Red-headed Woodpeckers, an immature and an adult.

August 4: There were 81 species entered into eBird by Bill Williams for the survey done at Craney Island. These included 23 Great Egrets, 15 Snowy Egrets, 1 Short-billed Dowitcher and 1 Red Phalarope.

August 7: Virginia and George Boyles joined leader Jane Frigo and 5 other birders in Newport News Park on a hot, humid and very, very quiet morning, for a walk that was cut short because of the weather and the lack of birds. A total of 37 species were identified during the morning.

August 11: Bill Williams entered 79 species into eBird for the survey done at Craney Island. These included 4 Tricolored Herons, 1 Peregrine Falcon, 40 Black-necked Stilts, 43 American Avocets, 6 Marbled Godwits, 7 Wilson's Phalaropes and 3 Red-necked Phalaropes.

August 21: Geoff Giles, Marilyn & John Adair and George & Virginia Boyles joined leader Jane Frigo and 5 other birders for the HRBC walk at Newport News Park. A Black-and-white Warbler was a special treat and Green Herons were actively feeding in several spots. After the walk several members went to see an active Ruby-throated Hummingbird nest and were able to watch nestlings being fed by the female. The group was able to identify 46 species during the morning.



Photo by George Boyles

Photo by Shirley Devan



August 23: Shirley Devan visited New Quarter Park between 11 AM and 12:15 PM to coincide with low tide. She was looking for rails and herons. She heard a Clapper Rail but did not see it. She did see a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron that finally appeared in the open around noon—across the creek on the edge of the marsh.

Killdeer Keep Jogging—Keep Bob-bob-bobbing Along

By Tom McCary

Photo by Shirley Devan



I have a hunch that every birder can tell you what particular bird sparked his interest in birding. Usually a certain friend, teacher, or colleague is also recalled for encouraging the incipient bird watcher in his pursuit. No matter how long ago the kindling was ignited, the passionate birder will remember that initial fire.

I have always said that the Killdeer led me back to birding. Yes, sometimes there is an hiatus between youthful and mature birding. As a lad I was introduced to bird study by a neighbor and family friend, Mrs. Victor Sturralde. She

always kept a copy of Chester A. Reed's Bird Guide on her piano. She taught me not only to identify the birds in her garden by sight but also by their call and song. Known for her decorative needlework, Mrs. Sturralde would incorporate with great artistry the birds and flowers she loved in her handsome needlepoint creations. Pardon the pun, but I was hooked as well.

But college came and graduate school and teaching and the library beckoned more often than the garden. The old hobby of childhood was not forgotten, just put aside for a while. Several years passed by.

Then one day at a private school in North Carolina where I worked, I became aware of a bird bobbing away on one of the playing fields. Up and down he went, like a mechanical toy. It was a bleak day in late winter of 1981. "I know that bird," I thought. But I could not remember its name. It was not just the loss of memory which bothered me: it was another kind of loss. Something essential and vital was missing. Then, as if by magic, my boyhood delight in birds was awakened again by that mysterious bird, that persistent Killdeer, with each bobbing movement jogging my memory of birding discoveries of long ago.

Everything changed. I began to keep a list. I joined the local bird club and the Virginia Society of Ornithology. I participated in bird walks and outings. Bird watching became again an adventure, an interest I carried with me from job to job and town to town. And with the participation in clubs and excursions, news and wonderful friendships were made. Something marvelous had happened.

Needless to say, I shall never forget that special bird. And needless to say, when I am asked the question "What's your favorite bird?" my answer is quick and clear. "Why the Killdeer, of course." Could there be another? Actually, I could tell a story about that bird....

Thank You, Wild Birds Unlimited!

A big thank you to George and Val Copping at Wild Birds Unlimited in Monticello Marketplace for a donation of \$465. This is based on sales to WBC members during the period of January–June 2011.



Williamsburg Bird Club Book Review

By Jeanette Navia



Nests: Fifty Nests and the Birds That Build Them, by Sharon Beals. Chronicle Books, 2011. ISBN 9780811877589. \$29.95. 356 p. Williamsburg Library call number 598.1564 BEA.

When I first flipped through Sharon Beals' book of nests, the pictures didn't excite me as much as I thought they would. Beals photographed each nest in a studio against a black background. The nests were complex pieces of nature taken out of context, isolated from their habitats, and arranged by the artist to enhance their beauty. They seemed odd, removed from their normal environment.

Once I read the introduction, however, I understood that the nests were from museums and similar collections, not recently ripped from trees or taken from beaches or grasslands. And after reading the descriptions of the birds' behavior associated with each nest, I could appreciate the beauty and skill inherent in the construction. Beals, a photographer based in San Francisco, was given access to collections of nests from The California Academy of Sciences, The Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, and The Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology. She was given careful instruction from the curators on how to handle the nests before being allowed to arrange the nests with her photographic eye.

Beals wanted to show the intricate—or, in the case of the Caspian Tern and the Common Rock Sparrow, the loose, haphazard but effective—construction of the nests of each of the birds she chose to photograph, and she did an excellent job.

Although the pictures are stunning, I found the text to be more interesting. Beals describes the courtship behavior of each species; the color, size, the usual number of eggs per nest; the atricial or precocial state of the hatchlings; the parenting duties of the male and female of each species; and the fledgling behavior of the young.

“...Verdins bond with long flights, and mate while fluttering downward through the air. Thought to be a monogamous pair, they stay together for the season, often raising two broods together... With the male doing most of the work, they clear the site of thorns, build a platform of twigs fastened with spiderweb, and weave a dome of prickly sticks, adding as many as two thousand twigs in two days. The female adds a middle layer of crushed leaves, stems, flowers, seedpods, or feathers. Then she installs an inner lining of downy plant material, leaves, and more feathers from owls, quails, doves, chickens or ducks, binding these with even more spiderweb....”

Accompanying each description is a small drawing of the bird in question by Laurie Wigham. Beals, concerned about ecology, also includes information about the conservation status of each species. The species are varied and from all over the world. Birds familiar to the Eastern United States include the Pine Siskin, Song Sparrow, Caspian Tern, Green Heron, and Barn Swallow. There are also exotic and rare species like the African Palm Swift, Strange Weaverbird, Verdin and Chinese Bulbul.

This is a wonderful book to flip through to simply enjoy the photos, or to dip in here and there to read about the nesting behaviors of specific birds.

Hello Kiptopeke Challenge Supporters!

From Brian Taber

We plan to have our same team for the 17th Annual Kiptopeke Challenge on September 24, 2011....Paul Nasca, Calvin Brennan, Chris Foster and me....our Wild Birds Unlimited of Williamsburg team is the only one to have competed every year. We will again explore the Eastern Shore from before sunup to after sunset!

In past years, we have dedicated our KC efforts to a particular friend who had recently passed away and this year, sadly, two friends are no longer with us. Mary Pulley died February 7th. She was a faithful volunteer for many years and the Observatory helped establish the Mary Watt Pulley Wildlife Preservation Fund in 2007, which is operated by the Mathews Community Foundation. Doris Smith died July 9th. She, along with husband Walter and four others, were the original Kiptopeke Songbird Station Founders. We owe so much to these wonderful women and they will inspire us throughout our big day...and after.

The 50th anniversary of the Kiptopeke Songbird Station will be in fall 2012 and as part of our celebration, the Observatory is creating a special fund just to protect the Station by earmarking funds...and our team will donate a portion of our fund-raising efforts to that special fund to help it get started.

Kiptopeke Challenge funds will be used to support our public education and programs, including our songbird banding, hawk banding, Northern Saw-whet Owl banding, hawkwatches, Monarch butterfly research, Prothonotary Warbler nest box project and many others.

We greatly appreciate your support over the years and hope you can sponsor us again. The recent economic downturn has dramatically decreased donations to the Observatory, though we understand the plight of many unemployed and underemployed Americans during this tough time. Last year, we won the trophy for most funds raised and also came in 3rd with 116 species (missed 2nd place by 1 bird!). As always, we'll send you our report right away.

If you are interested in supporting this endeavor please send a check payable to CVWO to Brian Taber at 103 Exeter Court, Williamsburg, VA 23185.

If you have any questions, please e-mail Brian at taberzz@aol.com or call at 757-253-1181.

Virginia Important Bird Areas Conservation News—Focus on Team Warbler, the Atlantic Flyway Initiative and Saltmarsh Habitat and Avian Research Project (SHARP)

by Mary Elfner, Audubon's Virginia Important Bird Area Coordinator

Audubon in Virginia has several conservation projects to highlight during this season: one of our most exciting is an international partnership between Richmond Audubon Society, Panama Audubon Society National Audubon Society and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) called “Team Warbler—From Chesapeake Bay to Panama Bay and Back—Cross Cultural Connections Supporting Sustainable Communities.” Working under a Community Engagement grant from VCU, championed by Cathy Viverette, VCU Life Sciences Research Associate, this project seeks to connect students, researchers and Richmond Audubon in the Chesapeake Bay watershed to Panama Audubon in the Panama Bay watershed to raise awareness of and better understand the Prothonotary Warbler. Here is an account from Dr. Lesley Bulluck, VCU Biology Professor, who led a team of VCU students and associated researchers to Panama in early January: “The VCU college class arrived on the afternoon of January 6 and drove to Gamboa, where we would stay for the entire trip. The house we stayed in was owned by our guide Guido Berguido and was tucked nicely up to the rainforest edge. This prime location allowed us to wake that first morning to see numerous new tropical bird and mammal species at the feeders—red-legged honeycreepers, blue-crowned motmot, and tamarind monkeys were just a few highlights. We spent most of the day on January 7 training the students on field methods and visiting two of our field sites. On January 8 and through January 13 we collected data in each of these six sites twice; we split up into two groups and the students alternated each day between banding in the mangroves and taking data on density and foraging rates in the mudflats of Panama Bay. On January 12, a group of middle school students from San Carlos came to our banding station in Playa Bonita to observe and learn about what we were doing. They were an enthusiastic group who were ready to get muddy and make observations of birds and mammals during the long trek to the station. In the mangroves, we captured a total of 160 individual birds of 25 different species and banded most of individuals that are Neartic-Neotropical migrants. We conducted most of our 2 minute foraging observations on 6 species and ~280 individuals across the three mudflat sites. We were happy to catch 26 of our target species, the Prothonotary Warbler, which we have been studying long-term here in Virginia.”

Another exciting on-the-ground conservation project in Virginia is our involvement with Maryland/DC Audubon and associated researchers on the Saltmarsh Habitat and Avian Research Project (SHARP), which benefits marshland species such as Seaside Sparrow, Saltmarsh Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, Willet, American Black Duck and Clapper Rail. The overall project objective is to identify important regions for tidal marsh birds along the non-barrier-island Atlantic States (Bird Conservation Region 30) and to identify which regions and species within this area may be most sensitive to land and seascape change (e.g. sea-level rise, coastal or upland/watershed development, and fresh or marine water quality degradation). This survey helps Audubon in our regional conservation initiative, the Atlantic Flyway Initiative (AFI), which exists to bring together Audubon programs in eastern seaboard states. The AFI saltmarsh working group works to identify threats to salt marshes and the habitat they provide to high priority species. We will be conducting surveys mid-April to the end of June of this year. And many thanks to the Virginia Society of Ornithology Conservation Committee for their conservation grant to support part of the field work of this critical conservation project in Virginia IBAs in marshlands of the Chesapeake Bay. To learn more about this exciting conservation project, please visit: www.tidalmarshbirds.org.

WBC August Walks & Field Trips

Complete lists of species seen on each walk are on the club website at www.williamsburgbirdclub.org.



Left to Right: George Boyles, Jeanette Navia, Linda Scherer, Jan Lockwood, Cheryl Jacobson, Geoff Giles, Inge Curtis, Shirley Devan and Virginia Boyles.

Photo by Jane Frigo of the HRBC

August 7—Purple Martin Madness, by Geoff Giles

Wow! Can you believe 27,000 or so performing birds coming out on a stormy Sunday evening to entertain the Williamsburg Bird Club? That was the scene on 6 August in Richmond. You have to see that spectacle sometime to believe it. It is expected to continue nightly until about mid-August, when most of the performers, purple martins, will depart for their wintering grounds in the Amazon, with many staying in Brazil until joining us here again next spring.

The Richmond roost that the martins are flocking to is in a free-standing row of large Bradford pear trees just north of the 17th Street Market. Large flocks of martins numbering in the thousands will continue to swarm and swirl in the skies every

evening above this roost and then swirl down in droves to dive into the trees, until nature calls them to head south. There were a number of surprises in seeing the spectacle unfold before our eyes. One was the level of sound of the bird chatter as thousands of the travellers swarmed into the trees. The noise and excitement is certainly understandable, since these guys are getting ready to blast off for the Carnival in Rio.

Most of the martins in this roost appeared to be young, hatch-year birds, judging by their coloration. We had the good fortune to be joined by birders Jane Frigo and others from the Hamp-



Photo by Jeanette Navia

ton Roads Bird Club and Richmond Audubon Birder Sue Ridd. Sue and her colleagues shared their observations of this fall spectacle over the last five years. The numbers in this roost show some fluctuation with a low one year of only several thousand and this year's numbers being the highest in memory. Expert counters give best estimates of the numbers and then cross-check estimates by using decibel ratings of the chatter in the trees, which usually is at least as loud as a lawnmower!



All eyes were on the towering bank building nearby, as the Richmond folks pointed out the ledge near the top (forty stories or so high?) where the peregrine falcon generally launches into a streaking nearly vertical stoop surprise attack into the middle of a mass of martins and spears an unlucky bird for his meal. We were shown a photo of the peregrine made a day earlier after one such attack with a martin in his grasp. The sky was cloudy and turbulent with occasional rain showers the evening we were there, but the martins swarmed in by the thousands. Their relief was visible that the peregrine gave them the night off. In fact it was particularly evident in the way they relieved themselves once

they were perched. One lady who went under the trees for a closer look at the action prudently carried an open umbrella to fend off a guano shower!

So what do the martins eat to fatten up for migration? Mosquitoes, right? Well, not according to the Cornell Lab's research data. Martins have had stomach contents which include lots of flies and nearly every known insect except mosquitoes. Cornell attributes this to martins roosting, whether in martin houses for their nesting or migratory mass roosts like this one, around dusk and leaving the roost before dawn to feed all day at higher altitudes. Since mosquitoes are near the ground and out at dawn and dusk they are not on the martin's menu, and the widely held belief that martins are great mosquito eaters is just not the case.

Incidentally, the martins are nearly totally dependent on mankind's largesse these days, in putting out martin houses for them to nest in. The cavities they once used are few and claimed by more aggressive invasive species. Judging by our roost, they had a good nesting year!

As always, an event like this was all the more pleasant thanks to the chance to share it with kindred spirits, including members of our club and other birders and nature-lovers. And as usual, the birds in their element when viewed through binocs and scopes both amazed us and tugged at our heartstrings. By the way, there is plenty of free street parking near the roost at the two hours before dark when this nightly event is taking place, and you can follow the folks with binoculars heading to the roost site when you get close.

August 12—Bird Walk in the Twilight Zone at New Quarter Park, by Geoff Giles. Ten brave birders, led by Geoff Giles, smoked out thirty species of birds on our 13 August walk in New Quarter Park. The atmospheric conditions were far from ideal, as the winds had shifted and dumped the acrid smoke from the wildfires in the Dismal Swamp on our birding area and then died completely. That left us with poor visibility and an unearthly silence at the start of our walk. Not only were fall migrants not yet in evidence, even most of the “usual suspects” were silent and out of view.

The tide was very high and still coming in, so the few ospreys, GBH's and great egrets in view seemed to be just killing time instead of actively fishing. A lone mature eagle soared majestically over us and crossed the marsh and continued off into the distance. The most exciting moment was provided by an unidentified, large flapping object in the distance over the marsh, which circled and then drew a bead right for our observation point and eventually passed right over our heads. It proved to be a very large, and very scruffy looking swan—an immature mute swan.

There was not much action on the high ground either, except for one very vocal indigo bunting who seemed to be belting out his best number for “Indigo Idol”. For the few who were left at that point, he proved hard to view until he took a brief bow on a bare limb after he concluded his number and flew off!

After the walk, Geoff paused by the parking lot to look up into a sudden spate of bird chatter, to see several Carolina Chickadees and a Tufted Titmouse high in the trees. Suddenly a small bird swooped down to a close branch of a nearby oak and picked off a succulent green inchworm. An unobstructed view for the binocs showed this to be a beautifully colored Yellowthroated Warbler. While chomping down his prize, he gave great views of his colors from the front, bottom and side. After sitting for a moment after his meal, when one of his species flew by, he sailed off with his friend across the parking lot. Sure wish he could have appeared sooner.

Our birders who braved the smoke for this walk included: Jean and Mike Millin, Jim Booth, Jennifer Trevino, Sharon Plocher, David Taylor, Cathy Millar, Sarah Lewis, Jan Lockwood and Geoff Giles. Thanks to all for pleasant birding on a quiet morning!

August 27—Field Trip to Crancy Island cancelled due to Hurricane Irene.

August 27— Bird Walk at New Quarter Park cancelled due to Hurricane Irene.

Photos from Members



Inge Curtis took this picture of a Royal Tern with a begging baby at the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel.



Inge Curtis took these four photos of a Eastern Kingbird, a moulting Northern Cardinal, a Great Crested Flycatcher and a moulting Ruby-throated Hummingbird.



Green Heron—taken by Joe Piotrowski at Newport News Park on August 20th.



Bird ID from Recycle Bin Photos

By Joe Piotrowski

This feature is only on the website and in the electronic version of *The Flyer*. The answer to this month's "puzzle" will be given in the next electronic newsletter, as well as on the website.



September's bird photo



August's bird is an Acadian Flycatcher.

CALENDAR

Sunday, September 4	HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7AM, Jane Frigo, Leader
Thursday, September 8	HRBC Monthly Meeting, Conference Room at Sandy Bay Nature Center, 1255 Big Bethel Road, Hampton, 7 PM. Bob Ake will report on his Big Year birding in 2010.
Saturday, September 10	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8AM, Tom McCary, Leader
September 16–18	VSO Field Trip to Chincoteague. For further info go to www.virginiabirds.net
Saturday, September 17	WBC Field Trip to Kiptopeke. See Front Page.
Sunday, September 18	HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7 AM, Jane Frigo, Leader
Wednesday, September 21	WBC Monthly Meeting, See Front Page
Saturday, September 24	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7 AM, Bill Williams, Leader
October 7-9	Eastern Shore Birding Festival. For further information— www.esvafestivals.org