

Williamsburg Bird Club Notes

The initial meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club drew better than thirty avian enthusiasts to Andrews Hall on September 21, 1977. The meeting centered around discussion of plans for the group, concerning field trips and topics of interest to which future meetings could be devoted.

General membership gatherings will be held in Andrews Hall Auditorium, Room 101, on the third Wednesday of every month. Meetings will convene at 7:30 P.M. It is hoped that we can have a field trip to one of our near-by birding "hot spots" the week-end following each of the meetings. Plans for these trips will be finalized at each monthly meeting, and an outline of the birds expected will be presented.

Since our club has such a varied array of expertise and birding knowledge, we are hoping to get wide participation in our field work. These field trips should be the most profitable function of the organization. Novices can benefit from the pointers the experienced birders have, and those of us who bird frequently will be able to accumulate additional bird data and increase the competitive state and yearly lists.

The September 24th field trip attracted only five of our Club members. They dutifully journeyed to the Kiptopeke banding station on the Eastern Shore only to find no migrants in flight. A decision was made to travel to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on the northern portion of Virginia's Eastern Shore. Our birders were greeted by hot and dry conditions on the Refuge and actually recorded few bird species considering the time of year. Highlights for the day were a good representation of herons and egrets, including Louisiana, Little Blue, Green and Great Blue herons as well as Snowy and Great Egrets.

On this same day Bill Williams observed two fulmars eight miles off the coast, east of Parramore Island on the Eastern Shore. Also seen, were other pelagic species such as Cory's shearwater, northern phalarope and an unidentified jaeger. The fulmar sightings are important since this species has only been considered as "accidental" in Virginia, there being no more than two records for it since 1920.

Weekend hawk counts have proven very profitable lately. Mitchell Byrd, Betty Williams and Bill Williams counted almost 900 sharp-skinned hawks on October 2 at the Kiptopeke banding station. Also seen were three peregrine falcons, coopers hawks, Osprey's (all of these endangered species), kestrels (sparrow-hawks), merlins (pigeon hawk), red tail and red shouldered hawks. The previous day Dave Sobal, Sue Ridd, Mitchell Byrd and Bill Williams counted only 570 sharp-skins along with 2 peregrines, 10 merlins, 3 coopers hawks, and a number of ospreys and kestrels. All in all a very rewarding week-end considering the strong southerly winds. Generally, strong southerly winds, during fall migration, do not produce a great number of migrants. Have we found something worth paying further attention to?

Fred Blystone has reported seeing an immature black-crowned night heron recently on his ramblings about Jamestown Island. These are the kinds of observations we need to record.

Our October field trip will be to Craney Island landfill in Portsmouth, Virginia. This area is an excellent place to observe shorebirds, gulls, terns, and during the winter, many species of ducks. The great attraction to Craney Island is its record for rarities. In recent years, such foreign species as black-headed gull, curlew sandpiper, and ruff have been seen there. Great cormorants, eared and western grebes, glaucous, Iceland and little gulls, and even a white pelican have brought many prominent birders there in the last few years. During the winter, snow buntings and Lapland longspurs have become almost regular. A peregrine falcon has been a steady "goody" the past two years. You just never know what interesting bird you'll find at Craney Island. We hope everyone will attend. Warm clothes and plenty of eats are strongly recommended. Most of the time, our birding stops can be easily driven to by car, so tramping around will be minimal.

A brief note of our November field trip date and destination. We plan on a local trip to Hog Island, and Jamestown Island on November 19. This will give everyone an opportunity to check out areas for the Audubon Christmas count scheduled for December 18, 1977.

The program for our October meeting will concentrate on one family of birds, Pandionidae. The osprey, or fish hawk, as it is commonly called, belongs to this family, and has worldwide distribution near fresh and salt water. The osprey has always been a common breeding bird in the Tidewater area of Virginia. Though still common in some areas, many observers have noted a gradual population decline during the past 20 years. Mitchell A. Byrd, professor of Biology, College of William and Mary, has been working with the breeding behavior and reproductive success of the osprey for the past ten years. He will present the program and will discuss the role of environmental contaminants on the osprey population. Also, a short film entitled "The Empty Nest" will be shown.

A small collection of bird books of interest will be available on display at the October 19th meeting. A list of some of the more interesting books will be distributed at that time.

A note to feeder enthusiasts: now is the time to put out seed. Take the time each day to record the various species feeding. We want early arrival dates for winter visitors such as white-throated sparrows, evening grosbeaks and purple finches.