

The Williamsburg Flyer
July 1983

We're on the downhill side of 1983 now and as the days shorten one must be reminded that the "fall" migration is already well underway. Locally you'll notice it with the flocks of grackles and starlings that mill about over open areas. On the shore it's most perceptable with the movements of the "peeps", those chattering little avian waifs that beginning and experienced birders alike eye with scope and field guide trying to discern their true identity. The birds know and therein lies the important issue. Yet for other species the breeding season is still the order of things. Bluebirds are into their second broods, while goldfinches are just getting their first nesting underway now that the thistle has bloomed. Birds are so much hustle and bustle and faithfully entertaining.

Remember there will be no meeting this month or next. We will reassemble the third Wednesday in September.

There will be a July field trip. It will take place Saturday, the 23rd with Grandview Beach in Hampton as the target area. Bob Cross will gather everyone together at 7:00 a.m. at the parking lot to the immediate right of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center from the Colonial Parkway side. From there a caravan will make its way to Grandview. The object of the trip will be shorebirds, gulls and terns, herons, egrets and ibis, least bitterns and marsh wrens and seaside sparrows. Be prepared for a walk on the beach and bring a pack or canteen for water and/or munchies. The least tern colony at the tip of the Peninsula had approximately 700 breeding adults this year as well as 2 pairs of piping plovers. The terns seemed to have had an excellent nesting campaign, thanks in part we hope, to our club along with the Hampton Roads Bird Club and the Hampton Parks Department posting signs around the area asking people to avoid the nesting location. I guess you could say we have a stake in Grandview. Go on down and see why!

Fred Blystone will be mailing out bird seed sale forms next month for the fall and early winter purchases. Be sure to pass the information along to friends and neighbors.

The club has recently purchased several new books for the Williamsburg Regional Library. The list is as follows: The Birdwatchers Activity Book by Donald Heintzeman, How Birds Work - A Guide to Bird Biology by Ron Freathy, A Guide to Bird Behavior, Volume II by Donald and Lillian Stokes and The American Robin a Backyard Institution by Len Eiserer. As always, if you know of any bird books you think the library could use, let someone know so we can purchase it.

Our bluebird trails seem to be in great shape. Of the ten boxes at the Williamsburg Country Club, 9 are in use by bluebirds and one has been temporarily rendered out of commission due to a wasp nest. Already about 20 young have fledged there and all the boxes are filled again with either eggs or downy young as the parents move through a second go 'round. In addition, the nesting facilities at Eastern State Hospital also have young, probably a second brood as well.

Leigh Jones (229-2476) our Bluebird Committee Chairperson and club Treasurer has bluebird houses for sale at \$3.00 a piece. She also has a few metal poles she'll part with for \$10. If you have bluebirds in your area, maybe you can interest them in a second nesting before the summer ends.

The purple martins are also "young at heart". Dick Hines has twelve fledglings in his martin house and four more on the way. Likewise, new martins are quite evident at the nest holes on boxes throughout the area. Their soft trills in the morning and evening seem to take a bit of the edge off the heat, huh?

Last month's field trip had fifteen participants, saving my skin for getting the word out late! The red-cockaded woodpeckers were right on cue and gave most everyone good views of this quality bird. Their plaintive cries about the nest holes speaks of wilder times when pine woods weren't a crop and the birds had sufficient area to forage and establish new nest sites. The group also saw a loggerhead shrike, a bird that has all but vanished from the coastal plain in the last decade. For reasons unknown, the "butcherbird" is no longer a part of the rural farmland scene, removing the chance of a child discovering a thorn tree or bush where the shrike would impale its larder for future consumption.

With Teta Kain's assistance, several of us (Ruth Beck and Tom Armour) checked out a common tern colony that is very much alive and well on the rock-sand area around the "island" at the southeastern end of the east bound tunnel across Hampton Roads on I-64. The estimate 350 pairs of terns were attending large downy young and were joined in their nesting by over 100 black skimmers. What a sight to see all of this breeding effort amidst the roar of lines of traffic and the passage of gigantic ships. This colony is certainly the southern-most of its kind in the state and may very well be the only one away from the barrier islands!

Over on the Eastern shore the ninth annual Colonial Waterbird Survey took place June 19-23. Ruth Beck, Brian Taber and Leigh Jones participated along with Jerry Via, Bill Akers and Tom and Ali Wieboldt. The herons, egrets and ibis all had large young and a white ibis was seen in a heronry on Cobb Island. A heron colony on Wreck Island was attended by a great horned owl as it was last year. The terns (royal, Caspian, least, sandwich, gull-billed, common and Forster's) seemed to be very successful this season having been spared the ravages of beach flooding and colony washouts. Black skimmers had lots of young and it wasn't uncommon to see four young in a nest and even a few nests had up to 5 eggs! Unusual birds for the trip included a single white pelican, numerous brown pelicans (some seen feeding fledged young - they nested at Oregon Inlet, N.C. this year) 2 northern phalaropes and a marbled godwit. Marsh hawks were seen on several islands.

Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour were prowling around Jamestown Island early the morning of June 30 when Bill encountered two animals few people have the pleasure to see. Minks. Well guess who didn't have his camera to record Bill's finding. Instead they just had to settle with watching the pair from a distance of 30-40 feet. Capt. Sheehan wanted to know if he could count them on his list. I suggested that everyone should have a mink in their closet. Go ahead!

Black skimmers are with us again this summer. Three were spotted at Indian Field Creek near Yorktown on July 3.

Dick Hines, C&P's answer to Bill Dance and Roland Martin (professional bass fisherman), was tooling along old route 168 to West Point recently and saw a hen turkey accompanied by several little bantam hen-sized turklets. Apparently the brewery has been hauling grain along this route and Dickie says the animals are all over the roadside piggin' out on the "fall out".

Yellow-billed cuckoos (colloquially, rain crows) are finally being seen and heard. The absence of large numbers of tent caterpillars the last 2-3 years has made the cuckoos less visible. A least bittern was seen at Chickahominy Haven

June 26 and several people are reporting great success with hummingbird feeders attracting anywhere from 2 to half a dozen of the fiesty. winged jewels.

Next month's field trip will be on Saturday, August 20 to Craney Island.