

## THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

October 1986

October is the time for chilly nights and cool breezy days---right? Wrong. At least the beginning of the month and the end of September have felt like July in Georgia. Temperatures in the 90s and few cold fronts have produced a migration that has trickled through our area.

The birds have been here, though quietly. When cold fronts do pass through coastal Virginia in the Fall, they often carry dramatic weather changes and flocks of birds of many species. Young birds, though difficult to identify, add to the numbers we saw in Spring and help create a brief but exciting spectacle.

There is still time, however, for waves of warblers and thrushes to appear until about the end of October. White-throated Sparrows should be in Williamsburg by the end of the month to stay in our bushes and near feeders until mid-May. Our feeders will see increasing activity as temperatures drop.

Speaking of feeders, our Bird Seed Savings Day pickup is scheduled for October 18th from 8 a.m. until noon at the Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road near Route 199. Please be sure to pick up your orders so that we do not have to re-load and store any more seed than necessary.

October 18th is also the date for our field trip to Hog Island, so if you plan to attend the trip, please try to arrange for someone to get your seed. The group will assemble at the Information Center at 7 a.m. If the weather remains mild, bug spray is recommended. There should be herons, shorebirds, a few ducks, geese and swans present, with perhaps an eagle or two.

The September field trip to Kiptopeke was lead by Bob Cross and attended by 5 club members who saw the Chesapeake Bay Tunnel Islands, bird netting and banding as well as hawk counting at Kiptopeke. It was a full day.

Our October program will be held on the 15th at 7:30 at Millington Hall. Tom Armour will share some beautiful slides and memories of a recent "non-birding" trip to the Far East.

At the September meeting, Ty and Julie Hotchkiss took us all on a trip to Newfoundland and Labrador, an exquisitely beautiful area where the sea and the shore and thousands of nesting birds all come together.. We saw picturesque landscapes, interesting archeological sites and of course, lots of birds.

The Hotchkiss' saw Gray Jays, Rock Ptarmigans, Pine Grosbeaks, Mourning Warblers and a great variety of seabirds including Greater Shearwater, Northern Fulmar, Atlantic Puffin, Thick-billed and Common Murre, and Northern Gannet. Interesting mammals of the trip included Moose, Caribou and mink.

There have been a number of interesting bird sightings recently. Among them are a Connecticut Warbler and Philadelphia Vireo found at Williamsburg West by Fenton Day on September 9th. Fenton found another vireo on 9-18 in Druid Hills.

Nighthawks have been passing through especially in the late afternoon of the first two weeks in September. They have been seen as recently as September 30. On September 11, there were Blackburnian Warblers and Bay-breasted Warblers in my yard in Druid Hills, along with a yellow-throated Vireo.



Fenton also turned up a Cliff Swallow at St. George's field off of Greensprings Road near Jamestown. The pond that was there early in September rapidly disappeared as we have headed into phase two of the year's drought.

There have been a lot of noisy Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in Williamsburg since mid-September. Maybe their cousins, the Evening Grosbeaks will be close behind. Last year many were seen toward the middle and end of October though they did not make an impressive showing at most feeders throughout the winter.

On 9-22 I made a quick trip to Hog Island in Surry County and saw some early Tundra Swans and 2 Sanderlings that were in with a flock of Western and Semipalmated sandpipers.

Some interesting sightings were reported at our September meeting including that of an albino Barn Swallow at Fisherman Island by Paul Baker and a Song Sparrow still on eggs in Bob Morris' yard. Bill Williams mentioned that over 300 hawks were seen at Kiptopeke on the weekend of September 13, but that spectacular bird show was just warming up for the much more massive passage of late September to mid-October. Kiptopeke can be an amazing place to be when literally thousands of hawks of several species stream past in a matter of hours.

Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour watched a Merlin devour a bird of unknown species at Hog Island and some people who attended the Virginia Society of Ornithology's Chincoteague trip were able to witness a Merlin capturing a bat on the wing.

There has been some discussion and controversy about leaving hummingbird feeders out after mid-September. Some say it will encourage hummers to stay on into dangerous cooler temperatures, others say that the internal and often mysterious controls of birds will cause them to leave at the appropriate time. I look forward to more study and information on this topic. Julie Hotchkiss wrote to Birdwatcher's Digest to try to gather further facts.

Fred Blystone has reminded me to offer a warm welcome to new Club members Jim, Haire and Anne Supplee.

This newsletter has contained some inconsistencies in the way bird species have been written. Some mistakes are due to changes in official nomenclature, typographical errors, handwriting and a lack of education. After doing some homework I have found out some things that I hope will be as useful to others as they have been to me.

When writing the name of a species of bird, it is correct to capitalize the whole name, except the words following a hyphen, as in Greater White-fronted Goose and Red-throated Loon. However, exceptions occur in double "last names" which are hyphenated as in Common Barn-Owl, Wilson's Storm-Petrel, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Common Black-Hawk, Lesser Golden-Plover, Common Ground-Dove and others.

When referring to more than one species such as "Hey, there go some Blue-winged and Green-winged teal", the t in teal is not capitalized because it is not actually naming a species, but rather the group of birds known as teal.

Latin scientific names of species should be underlined or written in italics. The Latin genus or "group" name is capitalized while the

"descriptive", species and subspecies names are not. An example would be Leucosticte aretoa atrota, the "Black" Rosy Finch, a subspecies.

The most recent North American field checklist of the American Birding Association provides an excellent resource for looking up the often confusing common names of birds. Most field guides also carry the Latin scientific name, though there have been changes in these names as well as in common names.

If anyone can shed further light on this subject, please contact me so that I can run more details in an upcoming newsletter.

I have recently been seeing a lot of brochures and catalogues that advertise "squirrel-proof" bird feeders. I am having squirrel problems of my own so I've become interested in the different designs. Some work by using "moveable sleeves" on feeder posts. Others use the squirrel's weight to instantly snap the door shut on the feeder. There are also plastic dome "baffles" to put over and under feeders. It's quite a science.

If anyone has more ideas I would be happy to write them up in the newsletter to share with everyone who wants to feed fewer squirrels than they do now.

Bird of the Season:    Swainson's Thrush  
                                 Catharus ustulatus

October is a very good month in which to find a beautiful, but shy bird, Swainson's Thrush. It resembles our summer Wood Thrush, though it is grayish rather than reddish-brown on head, back and wings. It is spot-breasted also, but more subtly and the spots do not range as far down the breast as in the Wood Thrush.

An excellent field mark is the buffy eye-ring that is not present in the similarly colored Gray-cheeked Thrush. Swainson's used to be called Olive-backed Thrush due to it's beautiful body coloration.

The call note is a short "whit" and a "heep" sound is often made by night migrants. Swainson's Thrush breeds in the mountain West and throughout Canada. We can hear it's exquisite song in April and May in Williamsburg.

To submit information for the newsletter, please call Brian Taber at 253-1181 or write to 104 Druid Court, Williamsburg.