



THE FLYER

Volume 16, No. 9

October 1992

Williamsburg Bird Club

Brian Taber, Editor (253-1181)

October Events

Meeting

Wednesday, October 21st,
7:30 p.m., in Room 117,
Millington Hall on the Wil-
liam and Mary campus.

Program

Twice recipient of club re-
search grants, Tim O'Connell
will present an update of his
study entitled, "**Terns and
Skimmers in Virginia**". Tim
is now a biologist with the
Division of Natural Heritage,
Department of Conservation
and Recreation in Richmond.

Field Trip

Call Emily Sharrett at 229-
6199 to make reservations for
the field trip on **October 24th**
to the **Chesapeake Bay
Bridge-Tunnel and
Kiptopeake**. Lots of warblers
and hawks are expected.

We would like to take this opportunity to
welcome the newest members of the
Williamsburg Bird Club.

Mr. & Mrs. Henry DeGraff
219 Cherwell Court
Williamsburg, Va. 23188
565-1893

Coming Attractions

October 25th — Program on greenways
from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Williamsburg-
James City County Recreation Center on
Longhill Road.

November 18th. WBC meeting—The
November program, presented by Bill
Akers, will be entitled *A Kenyan Adven-
ture, Or Did I Really Eat That Zebra?*

December 4-6th, Back Bay Field Trip

December — Williamsburg Bird Club
Annual Winter Bird Count

May 14-16th, 1993, VSO Annual Meeting.
Hosted in Norton, Va. by the Cumberland
Nature Club. The banquet speaker will be
Ted Eubanks, who runs the Piping Plover
Project on the Texas and Mexican Gulf
Coast.

If you do not presently subscribe to *Bird
Watcher's Digest*, please see the offer on
page seven. Here is a chance to obtain a
very enjoyable and informative magazine
and at the same time raise money for the
club.

**The Club will not be holding a
bird seed sale this fall.**



Carolyn Lowe provides the following information about greenways.

The greenway movement is alive and well throughout America, bringing people back into the landscape. Is a greenway for the Historic Triangle an idea whose time has come? To help citizens answer that question, Historic Rivers Land Conservancy will present a program on greenways on Sunday, October 25, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Williamsburg-James City County Recreation Center on Longhill Road.

Carlton Abbot, Williamsburg architect and planner, will present his vision of a future Historic Triangle with expanded parklands, scenic viewsheds and historic sites connected by walking trails and bike paths. He will illustrate his ideas with slides and drawings. Linda Porter and Williams Neville, co-chairs of the Leesburg-Loudoun County Greenways Citizen Advisory Committee, will share their experience in shaping a greenway master plan, using visual aids to show how a greenway can be designed to preserve the character of the community and respond to its needs.

Why a greenway? Whether you're an outdoor enthusiast, nature lover, history buff, educator, business leader or just an all-around citizen, you could benefit from a greenway. Citizen-led greenway projects from North Carolina to California provide ample evidence. By linking their natural, scenic and cultural resources via a greenway, many communities are reaping benefits galore—recreational, ecological, educational and economic. A Historic Triangle greenway, linking resources from the James to the York river, could bring similar benefits to our community. An exciting prospect and a challenge.

Natural Areas Referendum Would Help Birds

From John Bazuin, Jr., Chairman
VSO Conservation Committee

There is a choice coming up in Virginia for voters this November that has profound implications for how we will save the best of our state's premier natural areas. In the past, direct protection has largely been obtained via private conservation groups (The Nature Conservancy, most notably), with incidental protection being afforded through federal (military bases, national forests, national parks, etc.) the state (wildlife management areas, state parks, and so on) property procurements. Now there is a chance to expand the array of participants in this protection of our finest natural areas to the citizenry at large.

The mechanism for doing so is the 1992 Parks and Natural Areas Bond Referendum, which will be on the ballot in November. This bond package totals \$95 million and will be used to purchase four new state parks areas, to purchase ten prime natural areas statewide, and to fund 225 construction and purchase projects at state parks across Virginia. The natural areas include many of the most highly sought and most imperiled that are currently known here. The park projects will include elimination of inholdings, addition of interpretive facilities, modernizing of park infrastructure, and similar activities. The construction funds will be a boon to a number of troubled local economies, as will the increased tourist dollars likely to flow from the improvements.

I feel that all members of the VSO and its chapters should vote "Yes" on this bond referendum.



Saving Migratory Birds

A Project for the Backyard Conservationist

By Jamie K. Doyle

Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

and Craig Tufts

National Wildlife Federation

The Private Land Ethic

Of the more than two billion acres of land in the U.S., almost three-fourths is controlled by private landowners. Quite literally, the future of migrant bird populations in the U.S. depends on the actions of private citizens.

While few private landowners have large tracts of undisturbed forest, many have a small grove of trees or a few shrubs in their backyard. In light of the scarcity of large forest tracts, small backyard woodlots become increasingly significant to migratory bird survival. This is especially true in urban areas, which often lack even the minimal habitat that a bird requires for stopovers (periods of rest and refueling) during migration.

With considerate landscaping, foraging habitat for migratory birds can be created in even the smallest of backyards. In this first of a two-part series, we introduce readers to the basic process and considerations involved in dedicating a portion of their property toward conservation of migratory birds.

The Migratory Bird Survival Plan

Q. What do migratory birds require for survival?

A.: Water, food, shelter, and nesting habitat.

Birds use **water** from a variety of sources for drinking and bathing. These sources may be as large as a lake or as small as a puddle. The type of **foods** migrant birds require varies according to the seasonal energy demands of migration, raising young, and molting.

Migratory birds arrive in North America just as spring's first generation of caterpillars begins to nibble away at the newly unfurled tree leaves. These tiny green larvae, full of protein and water, become the major food sources of migrant birds during their stay on the breeding grounds. Scientists have shown that migrants can reduce the number of caterpillars on a tree by as much as one half in order to meet their summer dietary demands! A single pair of warbler parents may remove caterpillars from more than one million leaves in just the ten days it takes to fledge a nestfull of young.

Berries are an important source of carbohydrates and fats in the diet of migratory birds. In the northeastern U.S. alone, nearly 100 plant species produce these small fruits. One group, the wild grapes, provides weeks of nourishment for more than 50 species of birds. Migrants rely on berries most heavily in the late summer and early fall.

Birds need **shelter** to escape predators such as hawks and cats, as well as to survive unpredictable and harsh weather. Quite often birds will take refuge in dense thickets of plants such as brambles, hollies, and viburnums.

Few species of migratory land birds find adequate habitat for raising young outside of forests. However, a good overall backyard habitat may encourage hummingbirds to nest in shrubs, phoebes under the porch eaves, or a sapsucker in the hollow of a dead tree.



Assessing Your Property

Q. Does my property provide adequate resources for migratory birds?

A: Let's find out.

On a piece of graph paper make a scale drawing of your property. Include existing structures such as buildings, fences, paths, and water sources as well as trees, shrubs, and wild flowers. Now, ask yourself:

- * Does my property offer a constant supply of clean water for birds?
- * Is there protection from harsh weather and predators?
- * Do the plants in my yard produce a constant and varied food source for migrants?

To answer this last question, refer to field guides, books on gardening for wildlife, or local botanical experts. In addition to identifying your plants, note whether or not they produce flowers and/or fruit, and at what time of the year.

Q. What can I do to provide the resources for migratory birds that my yard lacks?

A. There are a number of ways you can provide resources for birds on your property. Your final decision in this process will be based on the size of your property, your budget, and personal preferences. Keep in mind that the widest variety of natural elements will attract and provide resources for the greatest number and variety of birds.

Water

If you do not have a natural water supply of your property, there are several simple and inexpensive ways to create a water source for birds:

* Commercial bird baths are available in numerous styles.

* Place a shallow (<2") dish filled with water on a tree stump to create a homemade bird bath.

* Create a small pool using a fiberglass pond or by digging a hole and lining it with suitable rubberized or plastic liners.

* If you have the space and are willing to invest some money, hire professionals to add a large pond to your landscape.

Whatever type of water supply you choose, remember:

* The water source must be shallow, at least in part, so birds can bathe (anything over two inches is too deep for songbirds).

* The water should always be clean—regular scrubbing is required for heavily used baths.

* Ponds should be placed in sunny locations and bird baths in shady ones.

* Birds are attracted to running water. Hang a dripping hose or bucket over a shallow dish, conserving water with the aid of a recirculating pump.

* Birds need a quick escape route from predators. Overhanging branches and nearby bushes are usually sufficient.

This article will be continued in the November FLYER.

Jamie K. Doyle is a former member of the Williamsburg Bird Club and was editor of the FLYER.



Birds From Around the Area

A Barn Owl flushed from a duck blind near College Creek on 8/31 was not there when Tom Armour returned on 9/8, but there were pellets and animal parts indicating recent occupation. The Fulvous Whistling-Duck was seen at Queen's Lake from 9/9 thru 9/11. Bill Snyder reports an Osprey still around Jamestown Island on 9/27 and a Green-backed Heron near Oakland Farms on 10/1.

On 9/12, Bill Sheehan and Bill Snyder found a Great Egret, 3 Lesser Yellowlegs and a Kestrel at Drummond's Field, a White-eyed Vireo at Chippokes and at Hog Island, they added Caspian and Royal terns, a Northern Harrier and several Great Egrets.

Bill Sheehan still had hummers as of 9/27: on 9/13, in his yard, he found a Rose-breasted Grosbeak; he saw a Great Crested Flycatcher there on 9/15 and on 9/23, found a Magnolia Warbler; on 9/26, there were Redstarts, Black and White and Parula warblers. He also found Blue-winged Teal at Drummond's Field from 9/16 thru 9/21.

At Mill Creek on the parkway, near Jamestown, in addition to hawks, there has been a steady flow of other migrants during the last 2 weeks in September, including Red-headed Woodpeckers, Indigo Buntings, Canada Geese, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Cedar Waxwings, Bobolinks, Yellowlegs, Chimney Swifts and lots of Tree Swallows.

Cornell Ornithologist Warn Against Antifreeze Chemical in Bird Baths

Mixing glycerine with water in winter bird baths could harm the birds that drink and bathe in the water warn experts at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Furthermore, the risky practice is not particularly effective for lowering the freezing point of water, the ornithologist found, and they recommend electric heaters instead.

"There's no question that birds need help finding liquid water in the winter when their natural water sources freeze," says Todd Culver, the Lab's Education Specialist. "Bird bathers that don't freeze are a good supplement to feeders for attracting birds."

However, recent articles in magazines and newspapers around the country have recommended using glycerine, an alcohol-like chemical, as a bird-bath antifreeze. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has responded to dozens of inquiries from concerned bird watchers.

The Cornell ornithologists conducted experiments and consulted with wildlife veterinarians. They found two problems with using glycerine in bird baths:

- "Rather large concentrations of glycerine must be used to prevent a water bath from freezing," says Gregory Butcher, director of the Lab's Bird Population Studies Program. "In order to lower the freezing point to 15 degrees Fahrenheit, for example, you need a 30-percent glycerine solution," he said of the chemical, which is a low-level toxin and has a sweet taste. "Birds that ingest large amounts of the substance will experience elevated blood sugar levels, causing hyperglycemia and possibly death."

- "Many birds bathe and preen themselves in cold weather," says Culver. "If you use enough glycerine to prevent the water from freezing, it causes the feathers to mat. Birds bathe and preen to enhance the insulation value of their feathers. Matted feathers are poor insulators and can be fatal in cold temperatures."

A better solution to the frozen bird bath problem is an electric immersion-style heater, which costs only pennies per day to operate, the Cornell ornithologist recommend.



Bird of the Season **Fulvous Whistling-Duck** ***Dendrocygna bicolor***

Steve Reams has got it made. All he has to do is walk across his living room and point his scope at Queens Lake and he can watch waterfowl. On September 6th, the image through the scope that caught his attention was not a Mallard, the predominant duck on the lake. It wasn't a Wood Duck either. Or a Green-winged Teal. Or any of several other species of waterfowl that he had ever seen there.

This duck was smaller. It has an orange-brown head, with buffy cheeks. In the middle of the neck were grayish-white feathers, forming a small circular patch. The back showed a striking pattern of cinnamon and dark brown in a barred pattern. Along the tawny sides were white feathers, forming a horizontal line just above the water on the swimming bird. A whitish rump band was conspicuous.

The head was elongated, almost triangular, with a slight crest. The bill was grayish. A blackish line ran continuously down the back of the neck. The very long neck was only occasionally evident as the bird generally swam with its head close to the body. The bird undulated when it swam, unlike the steady pace of the nearby mallards. When Steve saw the bird standing, he noticed the very long, dark gray legs.

Surprise! It was a Fulvous Whistling-Duck! The Fulvous, according to my research, enjoys the farthest-flung breeding range of any duck, encompassing the north and south hemispheres of both the eastern and western hemispheres. The range covers four continents (while the Comb Duck, also a tropical species, is close behind with three continents).

There are 8 species of Whistling Ducks. They are also known as Tree Duck, though some species, including the Fulvous do not use trees much. Most are gregarious and nocturnal, though Steve's bird was solitary and diurnal (it was a dark, rainy day, when first seen, however).

In the United States, Fulvous are found breeding only in Texas and Florida, though they may wander throughout southern sections of the country.

Christmas Count

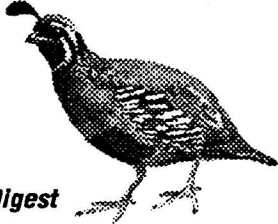
We still need someone to accept the responsibility of coordinating our Annual Christmas Count. I will assist the person this year, if necessary, in the hope that he or she will continue for 2 or 3 years. It really is fun and not difficult, but we need lots of people to accept such small jobs so that the Club can spread out our many activities over a large number of people.

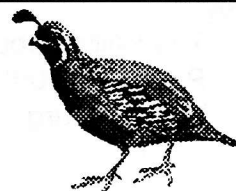
If you are interested in a very worthwhile assignment, please call me any evening, but call soon! I'll be waiting by the phone!

The newsletter editor will certainly appreciate all manner of calls and submissions of information for the newsletter. Please call Brian weeknights between 6 pm and 10 pm at **253-1181** or send articles, local bird sightings, information about birds seen on vacations and such to **104 Druid Court, Williamsburg, Va. 23185**. This will insure that our newsletter is a reflection of the membership. If you're not sure about what to send, please call. Thank you!

Dear Fellow Club Members:

The form below enables our club to benefit when you purchase a **new** subscription to **Bird Watcher's Digest**. The terms are as follows: for every **new** one-year regular or gift subscription at \$17.95, we'll receive \$9.00; for a **new** two-year subscription (\$29.95) we get \$15.00; a **new** three-year subscription (\$39.95) nets us \$20.00. Simply fill out this form, and send it with your payment (and the name of our club—see the line provided) to Bird Watcher's Digest. What better way to give a nice gift (to yourself or someone you know) and help us finance our future projects!

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