



## September Events

**Meeting** Wednesday, September 16th, at 7:30 p.m., in Room 117, Millington Hall on the William and Mary Campus

**Program** Bob Anderson, Environmental and Natural Resources Specialist with TRADOC at Ft. Monroe, will share his view of "**The Pleasures of Birding in Mexico**", with a nod to Yucatan's archaeological treasures. Bob, an energetic birder, lives in Norfolk.

**Field Trip** The September field trip will be to Kiptopeke to watch hawks. Call Emily Sharrett at 229-6199 to reserve a space. We will car pool to save money on the bridge-tunnel toll.

### August Field Trip

Tom Armour led the field trip on August 29th to Hog Island. He was accompanied by Homer and Betty Jones, Barbara Rockwell, Ann Young, Joy Archer and Lee Shuster. Together they found over 40 species of birds, including Cattle Egrets, Blue-winged Teal, a Bald Eagle, a Cooper's Hawk, Stilt Sandpipers, a Yellow-throated Warbler, Blue Grosbeaks and Bobolinks.

## Dates To Remember

September 18-20th, VSO Chincoteague Field Trip

October 10th—Pelagic trip out of Oregon Inlet (contact Brian Patteson, P.O. Box 1135, Amherst, Va. 24521)

October 8-12th—Minitour of North Carolina Outer Banks (contact Brian Patteson)

October 21st.—WBC meeting—Speaker will be Tim O'Connell

November 18th. WBC meeting—Speaker will be Bill Akers

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.

## The Great Outdoors

William and Mary's special fall program guides lists a Birdwatching course, taught by Bill Snyder on October 1st and 3rd. Register now to reserve class space!

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## **Blood Transfusion Saves Eagle**

(from *American Birds* magazine)

By performing what is believed to be the first blood transfusion involving a Bald Eagle, veterinarians at the Wildlife Center of Virginia saved the life of a starving, six month old female bird.

The procedure sustained the eagle while the staff administered additional fluids and nutrients. The techniques used, injecting blood directly into the bone marrow cavity, was actually developed for premature human babies, whose veins are too small for conventional transfusions. Previously, the Center had successfully used the rare procedure on other birds, including hawks and owls.

## **Outer Banks**

Tom Armour was on North Carolina's Outer Banks for 3 weeks in August and found a great deal of bird activity. He found a Curlew Sandpiper, both ibis, lots of herons and egrets and sandpipers, Avocets and Black-necked Stilts. He saw Caspian, Royal, Gull-billed, Common, Black, Sandwich and Least terns. Incredibly, he saw 3 Bridled Terns that hung around for 4 days in Kill Devil Hills!

## **Scotland Adventure**

**By Marilyn Zeigler**

While traveling in Scotland in July, I had a chance to see some birds along the Hebridean coast and meet a few other birdwatchers along the way. Off an inner sandy beach on the island of Iona where Vikings had murdered monks (8th century) was a Red-throated Diver, while plenty of Oyster Catchers worked the stony Atlantic beach. (Regrettably, there was not the extra half-day to take a boat trip to Staffa, where puffins were guaranteed.) Between the island of Mull and Oban on the mainland a pair of Arctic Skuas playing the pirate pursued prey fiercely, a knock-out performance. A pair of Black Guillemots paddled in the calm of Oban harbor displaying their bright red feet.

One day later a curtain of rain obscured glorious scenery north of Mallaig. Never, mind, sea birds ignored the weather. Dozens of Black Guillemots and Razorbills swam in view of the ferry as Manx Shearwaters wheeled over the waves.

On the east coast Firth of Forth, a female Eider with chick sailed by Inchcolm Island, which has a medieval abbey and colonies of nesting Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backs. Eight-foot grey seals abound here.

At Stirling University inland on an artificial loch were a Grey Heron, Black-headed Gulls, chicks of European Coot and Moorhen.

Earlier, in Derbyshire on the sparkling River Wye was a Dipper family, adult with two full-sized young. This Dipper has a distinctive white bib. Not far distant on moorland west of Sheffield one Red Grouse had made itself known, and several soaring Sky Larks.

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## Bird Feeding: Boon or Bane

From *FeederWatch News*, Autumn 1992

Are people who feed birds unwittingly causing the decline of migratory bird populations? According to Project FeederWatch, a winter bird feeding survey sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the answer seems to be no.

Concern for migratory birds has been mounting in recent years. Surveys suggest that many populations have declined seriously over the past decade. In his recent book, *Where Have All the Birds Gone?*, ornithologist John Terborgh discusses the possible causes.

He mentions deforestation on the neotropical wintering grounds and fragmentation of breeding habitat in North America, which most biologists agree are the main problems. But he suggests that bird feeding may be a worry as well. He wonders whether feeders may be causing increases in birds such as Brown-headed Cowbirds, which are nesting parasites, or Blue Jays, which are notable nest robbers. If so, he reasons, then bird feeding may be inadvertently contributing to the declines of many forest-dwelling species, such as warblers and vireos, that never even visit feeders.

To examine this possibility, Cornell ornithologist Erica H. Dunn turned to information from Project FeederWatch as well as data from the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), a continentwide survey of bird numbers in spring. She used the FeederWatch data to determine which feeder species are most widespread in North America, and the BBS data to learn which of them had been increasing and which had been decreasing during the past 25 years.

Surprisingly, she discovered that 70 percent of the most widespread feeder birds showed significantly declining populations. These included not only the nest-robbing Blue

Jay, but also nest-site competitors such as the European Starling and House Sparrow, as well as several other species often considered "pests". The Brown-headed Cowbird also declined, although not as much as many others. These findings don't mean these species are not hurting migratory birds through their predatory or parasitizing actions, but it does suggest that feeding them is not increasing their populations.

These observations raise another question—is bird feeding bad for bird populations? Are species such as the Blue Jay being hurt by the practice?

Probably not. Most of the declining feeder species belong to groups that are declining as a whole—even though some species in those groups don't visit feeders. These include mimics (thrashers and mockingbirds), towhees, certain blackbirds, and sparrows—birds that nest primarily in grassland or shrub habitats, which are also declining.

Bird feeding may harm some species, however. One study in England showed that regular feeding induced some Blue Tits and Great Tits to nest in suburban areas rather than their natural habitat, deciduous woodland. The suburban nesters showed very poor reproductive success because natural foods, especially the insects needed to feed nestlings, were in short supply. We don't know whether Blue Jays are responding to feeding by nesting in suburbia, only to suffer insupportable predation by cats and raccoons. We do know that American Robins, which often nest in suburbia, are showing population increases nationwide.

Conclusive evidence for the effects of bird feeding on bird populations awaits more detailed studies of each species. Meanwhile, bird feeding does not seem to cause increases in most of the species that frequent feeders, including "pest" species.

## Bird of the Season

### The Ovenbird

The Ovenbird's range is extensive for a warbler. This ground dwelling forest denizen breeds from northeastern British Columbia, southern MacKenzie, and northern Alberta, across southern Canada to Newfoundland, south to eastern Colorado, eastern Oklahoma, northern Arkansas, and the mid-Atlantic states to northern Georgia. Its wintering haunts include coastal South Carolina, Florida, the Gulf States, coastal Texas, the West Indies, Mexico, and Central America.

The Ovenbird is thrush-like in character. It walks, bobs, and teeters over the forest floor, gleaning insects, snails, earthworms, and slugs from the forest litter. Watching the antics of this neotropical migrant doesn't require birders to strain their neck muscles by looking to the treetops. An exception to the Ovenbird's terrestrial existence is during the breeding season, when the male selects a perch a foot or so above the forest floor to sing. The male seldom sings from the forest floor, but his flight song has been described as a jumble of musical notes.

The Ovenbird favors nesting in open, mature, dry deciduous forest carpeted with an abundance of fallen leaves, logs, and rocks. They occasionally inhabit wet or swampy forests, and in the extreme northern part of its range, they may nest in jack pine and spruce forests.

The female selects a slight depression on

the leaf-covered ground, and builds the nest of leaves, stems, and grass, and lines it with finer material, including hair. She covers the nest with a shallow dome of vegetation, creating a Dutch oven appearance. The entrance hole is usually a small slit at or near ground level.

During construction, the male avoids the nest site, but keeps busy defending the territory and warning his mate of any intruders.

The female lays 3-5 eggs and does all of the incubating. Attempts to rear more than one brood each season are rare. Within 11-14 days after the clutch is complete, the eggs hatch and, at this time, the male starts pulling his share of the child-rearing duties. A week to 10 days after hatching, the young leave the nest and strike out on their own.

Ovenbirds are an "area-sensitive" species, nesting exclusively in large, contiguous forest tracts. Where extensive forestlands remain intact, the Ovenbird is still common. Where forestlands have become fragmented, however, predation and cowbird parasitism take a toll of nesting Ovenbirds. Combined with the deforestation of Central and South American tropical forests the, challenges facing Ovenbirds appear overwhelming.

Breeding Bird Survey data analyzed for the years 1978-1987 suggest that Ovenbird populations declined 1% annually. As with other neotropical migrants, the Ovenbird is getting hit from all sides. However, the combined efforts of federal, state, and private interest within the Partners in Flight Program are helping to reverse the decline of our forest songsters before it's too late. This proactive approach to conservation may be just what is needed to avoid placing these birds on the endangered species list.

Torrential rains in August flooded a large section of Drummonds Field, turning it into a lake for weeks. It's too bad that it was not mowed just before the rains, though, as that would surely have attracted lots of shorebirds. Instead, the deep, weedy lake attracted over 100 Canada Geese and about 20 Mallards. Up to 3 Great Egrets visited and hundreds of swallows, including Barn, Tree and Bank were also there regularly. A few shorebirds did come, including both yellowlegs, Spotted, Solitary and Least sandpipers as well as well to 15 Killdeer.

Dick Fout reports that anyone wishing to see Ravens easily should travel to the Route 220 crossing of the Jackson River, just south of Clifton Forge, where they are quite accessible.

Bill Williams was one of 18 people aboard for a pelagic trip off Virginia Beach on August 22nd. Though birds and fish were not numerous, they were able to find Parasitic and Pomarine jaegers, Audubon's, Greater and Cory's shearwaters, Wilson's Storm-Petrels and Bridled Terns. They also saw Pilot Whales and a Northern Oriole that was 60 miles offshore.

Bill Sheehan reports a Yellow-throated Warbler in his yard on July 30th, probably an early migrant. Immature American Redstarts were there on August 11th and 12th. He also noted that Bluebirds used one box in his yard 3 times this season and were feeding young on August 10th.

On rainy August 15th, Bill Williams and I searched Hog Island for shorebirds mostly and found only a few Pectorals, yellowlegs, Semi-palmated Plovers and Semi-palmated Sandpipers. We did find an early Northern Harrier, tons of swallows, Black Terns and 2 Cedar Waxwings.

Bill Sheehan watched one of his unfavorite sights on 8/31, a baby cowbird being fed! This time, a Rufous-sided Towhee was doing all the work. Bill and Tom Armour found a Glossy Ibis in the long grass at Drummond's Field on 8/30. Marilyn Zeigler reports an American Bittern from the Pitch and Tar Swamp on Jamestown Island, also on 8/30.

Bill Snyder took a boat trip on Powhatan Creek on 8/18, finding 8 Great Blue Herons, 5 Ospreys, a Great Egret and 2 beavers!

Evidence of early raptor movement was displayed by 4 Adult Bald Eagles, a Red-tailed Hawk and an Osprey moving south together over Druid Court on 8/29.

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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!