



## August Events

### Meeting

There will not be a Bird Club meeting this month.

### Field Trip

Tom Armour will lead the trip on **August 29th** to **Hog Island** to look for shorebirds and other early migrants. Call Tom at 229-2363 or Emily Sharrett at 229-6199 to reserve a space.

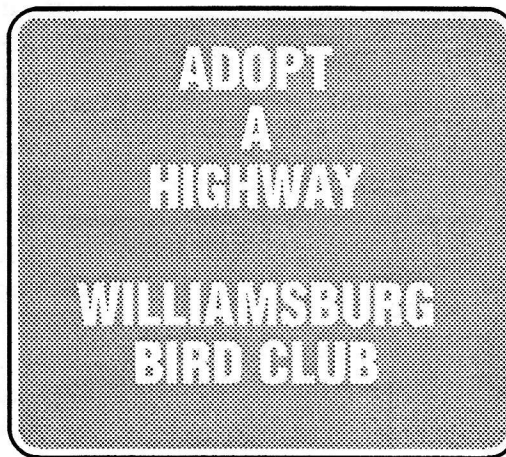
### June Field Trip

Tom Armour lead a group consisting of Chuck Wrenn, Marilyn Zeigler and Barbara Rockwell to York River State Park on the 20th. They found an Eastern Pewee nest, Yellow-billed Cuckoos and a Grass-hopper Sparrow, to name but a few.

### Student Research Grant

The recipient of the Club's student research grant is Ellen Bentley, a graduate student at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. Her project is entitled "A Description and Landscape Analysis of the Habitat Requirements of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, Great Egrets and Green-backed Herons in Tidewater Virginia."

She will present her findings at a future club meeting. Congratulations, Ellen!



From Bill Davies, Chairman of the Adopt-A-Highway Committee

Eleven good souls and true turned out for highway pickup on July 25th: Tom Armour, Fred Blystone and Louise Menges, Sam Hart, Pat Healy, Dick Mahone, Dorothy Whitfield, Bill Williams, Martha & Bob Burgess, (and yours truly). Two hours hard work allowed us to do the whole 2 miles and achieve the pick-up results detailed below.

Pounds recycled: Glass 103,  
Aluminum 19.5

10 bags of misc. trash were also picked up.

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## Return to Kiptopeke

(from the August 1992 issue of the VSO newsletter)

Five happy banders attended the dedication of Kiptopeke State Park on May 29, 1992. Walter Smith, Karen Terwilliger, David Leake, Fred Scott and John Dillard had abandoned hope of ever banding again at Kiptopeke Beach, the original site used for 28 years after being founded in 1963 by Fred. However, Dennis Baker, Director of the Virginia Division of Parks, had a long term goal of providing a state park on the Eastern Shore. Negotiations were completed by him in April 1992 for the Maddox property and with a magnificent effort by Parks employees, the site was opened one month after purchase. Best of all, the banding station is a part of their program. The banders, assisted by John Bazuin, gave a banding demonstration for the dedication group led by Governor Wilder.

Members are encouraged to come over to serve as banding assistants from September 9-October 30. We are at the old location, marked by a sign on the access road. Tell the entry attendant that you wish to visit the banding station. If you wish to bring a group larger than six people, notify the park superintendent, Scott Flickinger, 3540 Kiptopeke Drive, Cape Charles, Va. 23310, or call (804) 331-2267.

## Terns and Plovers

Ruth Beck, who along with several William and Mary students and W&M grads Bill Akers and Jerry Via, has been studying Piping Plovers and Least Terns, provided some information about their nesting seasons. She says that the Grandview Beach colony in Hampton has about 400 pairs of Least Terns, a great recovery from last years failed colony. No Piping Plover nest has been found there, however, the first miss in 20 years.

The Craney Island, Portsmouth Piping Plovers fared better, though, with 4 pairs of birds and 3 confirmed nests. Signs have been posted at both Craney and Grandview alerting the public to the problems of disturbance.

As part of the Colonial Bird Study, sponsored by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Ruth has also kept tabs on Common Terns nesting at the Hampton Roads Bridge-tunnel, where there are over 3000 pairs of birds.

### **Bird of the Season—Upland Sandpiper** *Bartramia longicauda*

August in our area is typically hot and dry. Fields have little of the standing water that is so attractive to most shorebirds. But such places, with their dirt and short grass are great for finding Upland Sandpipers.

The birds don't nest around here and are not common even in migration, so the challenge is to discover one in a flock of shorebirds or perhaps find one as its head pops up from the weeds.

There are a number of areas nearby in which to look, including Drummonds Field, Treasure Island Road, Forge Road and Hog Island, in Surry County. Airports and golf courses may also have suitable habitat. Scanning these open areas may produce Killdeer and Pectoral Sandpipers, which also like the dryness and rarely, Uplands will be present, slowly walking and picking at the ground.

Look for the long neck, the comparatively small head and the large dark eyes. The bird's size is between that of Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs. Blackish primaries, seen in the stiff, Spotted Sandpiper-like flight, contrast with mottled brownish and blackish inner wings and upper parts. The tail is longish, the legs are pale yellowish.

Uplands sometimes perch on dirt mounds, fenceposts, rocks and stumps. They are generally solitary and slow-moving, so check carefully in that open field. You may find a surprise.

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## Species' Outlook Improves

By Michael S.C. Claffey, Daily Press

A ragged line of people in shorts and hats stretches across the sandy spit that is Grandview beach. Each walks slowly and peers intently at the sand.

"Kit-tee, kit-tee, kit-tee" screech the tiny least terns, as they circle furiously in the breeze, trying to ward off the two-legged intruders in the birds' breeding ground.

"We have a hatchee and one egg," shouts out Bill Akers.

It's the first baby least tern of the year at Grandview. The bird is so newly hatched that it's still wet. It's sitting in a slight indentation in the sand, next to a light brown speckled egg that blends in perfectly with the background. "When he dries off he'll be all fluffy like a chick," said Akers.

A pharmaceutical salesman for Upjohn Co., Akers, 42, is a member of a team that has been keeping track of shorebird populations in this area for 20 years.

The group is headed by Ruth A. Beck, a College of Williams and Mary biology professor who specializes in studying birds that nest on beaches and wading birds, such as herons. Akers, who lives in Midlothian, and Jerry Via of Blacksburg both got involved when they were graduate students at William and Mary 20 years ago.

On Saturday, Beck, Akers, Via and four college students hiked out to the end of Grandview beach to count least tern nests. Stretching along the Chesapeake Bay, the isolated beach is part of a city-owned nature preserve.

The group heads to the beach almost every weekend in May and June. The state Department of Game and Inland Fisheries gives Beck a grant to keep track of the least tern population. A quarter-mile stretch near the northern end of the thin spit of land is home to one of the largest least tern colonies in the state, Beck said.

Although the species is not endangered in Virginia, it is listed as endangered on the West Coast, she said.

Least terns—tiny pearl gray birds, with white underbellies, black crowns, yellow bills and dark wing tips—are a migrating shorebird that spends winters in South America and summers up north, Beck said. They make their nests in open sand areas and eat small fish that they catch from diving into the water. They were tagged with the name "least" tern because they are the smallest member of the tern family.

As soon as people approach, the least terns take to the air and fly around in circles, making a high pitched screech. Sometimes they'll dive bomb intruders and pelt them with bird droppings, as happened to Via on Saturday, when he ventured too close to a nest.

Beck and her team are relieved that the terns have apparently made a comeback from last year, when for the first time in the past 20 years, the colony "crashed", or produced no offspring.

Beck said that heavy rains in the spring of 1991 and crowds at the beach on Memorial Day combined to make the least terns flee their nests before the eggs hatched. The eggs are vulnerable to extremes of cold and heat, plus predators, when they are left unattended.

But this year the team counted 384 nests, most of them with two eggs in them.

Early this century, the least tern populations was decimated by hunters who sold them to hatmakers, who used the birds as headpieces. "It was considered very stylish at one time," Beck said.

A federal law outlawed hunting migratory birds, and least terns made a comeback. A new threat arose in the 1950s and 1960s with development along the seashore. Beck said that the least tern population in Virginia has declined only slightly over the past 20 years.

The latest problem was vandals who in April pulled up and burned 30 no-trespassing

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As usual, the reporting of birds in June and July decreases as other summer activities increase. However, there is some news. Tom Armour has been watching the nest of a Green-backed Heron in Kingsmill, after being tipped off by Marty McDonald. Tom also reports 3 young Prothonotary Warblers at his yard and 2 young Wood Ducks nearby, while a neighbor has hosted 2 young Barred Owls.

Bill Sheehan and Tom cruised around Jamestown Island on July 27th, finding Red-headed Woodpeckers, Wood Thrushes and Marsh Wrens, among others.

Tom teamed up with Bill Williams and Tom McCary for a trip to Hog Island on the 29th and the group found a few early shorebirds including Pectoral and Stilt Sandpipers, Semi-palmated Plovers and some dowitchers.

Dick Fout reports seeing a female Ring-necked Pheasant on July 25th near his home on Skimino Road, adjacent to Camp Peary.

## **Pelagic Birding Trips**

Brian Patteson has organized 3 birding trips in off-shore waters. The first two leave from Virginia Beach on August 22nd and September 12th. The third leaves from Oregon Inlet on the North Carolina Outer Banks.

There are always exciting adventures. Whales and dolphins are usually seen, along with sharks, flying fish and of course, birds. There should be shearwaters, storm-petrels, terns and perhaps even tropicbirds.

For more information, contact Brian at (804) 933-8687.

## **Species' Outlook Improves**

(continued)

signs that Beck and her students had surrounded the nesting area with. Beck and the students promptly replaced the signs.

Beck just hopes that people who use the northern end of the beach obey the signs, especially during the hatching season.

"You see how vulnerable the eggs are," she said. "An unleashed dog plays havoc with them. An unleashed kid, too."

## **Bird Observatory Committee Established**

A committee has been established to explore the feasibility of having a bird observatory on the Eastern Shore, possibly at the new Kiptopeke State Park. The Western Shore has been recommended because of its importance as a major migratory route. Anyone who wishes to be a part of the committee, or who wants to provide comments and suggestions, is encouraged to call or write THE FLYER editor.

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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!