



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117, Millington Hall on the William and Mary campus, Wednesday, September 20. Program Chair Dan Cristol is pleased to announce that all of this year's programs will be organized around a single theme: "Potential Threats to Birdlife." Each speaker will be an expert in some area bird lovers should know about. The first program will address the serious threat that outdoor and feral cats pose to our birds. After getting a quick rundown on the threats faced by birds, we'll watch the National Geographic special "The Secret Lives of Cats" for an entertaining but hard-hitting look at the cat problem. It stars Ruth Beck's own wildlife-munching cat!

In October we will hear Virginia Power's wildlife biologist address the problem of bird electrocutions and other power line-bird issues. In November VDOT's wildlife biologist will tell us about the effects of highways on birds. Other experts on illegal wild bird importation, new bird diseases, etc. should follow in the new year.

Although a yearlong series on causes of bird mortality might seem depressing, we need to learn about these issues in order to bring about change. Each speaker has been asked to end his talk with a constructive, "What can you do to solve this problem?" message.

GOOD DAY AT CRANEY ISLAND

Clear skies, a steady breeze, and mostly cooperative birds on August 19 made this a good trip for the nine who gathered at 7:15 in the Colonial Shopping Center parking lot. Unfortunately, Ruth Beck had a medical emergency

which kept her in the hospital until later that day. Fortunately, graduate student Renee Held, who has been working with Ruth this summer at Craney Island, led the way capably.

Field trip coordinator, Alex Minarik's list at the end of the day held 40 species. There was plenty of opportunity for the group to sort out the peeps, the semipalmated, western and least sandpipers and by the end of the day most everyone could pick them out. Lone sanderling and ruddy turnstones showed up and while Bill Williams heard a white-rumped sandpiper, no one was able to put a glass on that one. A special treat was the Cooper's hawk that landed about 30 feet away and posed long enough for everyone to get a clear look.

Other shore birds included: willet, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, osprey, spotted sandpiper, solitary sandpiper, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, least tern, Caspian tern, royal tern, Forster's tern, black skimmer, brown pelican, semipalmated plover, short-billed dowitcher, ring-billed gull, laughing gull, herring gull, great black-backed gull and killdeer. Then there were others including: Canada geese, mallard ducks, shoveler ducks, mourning dove, northern harrier, kingfisher, barn swallow, mockingbird, common yellowthroat, song sparrow and red-winged blackbird.

The water in the impoundments was very high and the general feeling was that this had kept away the black-necked stilts, avocets and other "treat" birds that we've often seen at Craney.

The participants included: Tom Armour, Shirley Devan, Renee Held, Bill Holcombe, Alex Minarik, new club member Linda Sherrer, Richard Stanley, Bill Williams and Marilyn Zeigler.

BILL WILLIAMS LEADS FIELD TRIP TO KIPTOPEKE

Bill Williams will lead the September field trip on September 23 to bird the Kiptopeke area. This will include birding trails in the area, observations of bird banding, time on the hawk watch platform and, if time allows, some birding of the Bay-Bridge Tunnel islands. Much of the Atlantic flyway migration passes through this area each fall and there is a good chance that we will find a good selection of species. And maybe we'll see some interesting strays.

We will meet in the Colonial Shopping Center on Jamestown Road along the roadway side, opposite the Fresh Market to pool cars. The \$10 toll each way on the Bay-Bridge Tunnel can be shared by folks riding together. Be there by 7:15 a.m. so that we can be on our way no later than 7:30. Bring lunch and something to drink as it will be around 3 p.m. when we return. Cover against the sun and insects is also recommended.

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR "TEAM"

Our birding team led by Brian Taber and Bill Williams will again compete in the Kiptopeke Challenge on September 16 to raise money for the Coastal Virginia Wild Life Observatory. Last year they did their part by finding the winning number of birds, 138, and we did our part by contributing \$700. The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory that our Club participated in founding has steadily grown in stature as a source of information about the migrating birds that pass through the area. If you can help keep this good work going, send your tax-deductible check to the Coastal Virginia Wild Life Observatory, indicating that it is for the Kiptopeke Challenge. Mail it to Brian Taber, 103 Exeter Ct., Williamsburg, Va. 23185. It will help if you get the money in before September 16. Many thanks for your help.

AUGUST FIELD NOTES

The Virginia Audubon e-mail network has provided some early warning reports that the summer is ending and fall birding is on the way. The D.C. area has already seen pied-billed grebes and the

first brown creeper, Aug. 13. Closer to us, Tom Armour spotted redstarts on their way south.

Grace Doyle reports the first meadowlark that she has seen at Camp Peary in three years and husband Joe described the thrill of a very large, mature bald eagle silently soaring no more than 20 feet above them at Camp Peary. Other sightings: Aug. 6 - Bill Williams found an upland sandpiper on the baseball field as he was on his way to the Green Spring Nature Trail. Aug. 12 - Brian Taber reports an immature lark sparrow at Hog Island. (Since then the staff at the Kiptopeke operation has seen two mature lark sparrows.) Joe Doyle saw a pair of black and white warblers on the country road near Carter's Grove. Aug. 20 - Elias "Toady" Guy reported an albino mocking-bird in his yard at Drummand Field. Bill Holcombe got a picture of the bird from about twelve feet away as it ate apples tied to the deck railing. The bird moves about the yard and the feeding station looking like a mockingbird in size, behavior and carriage, but it has pure white feathers, yellow tinted legs and pink bill and eyes.

On Aug. 24, Bill Holcombe drove down the road in Culpepper again, past the field where the scissor-tailed fly catchers have been observed all summer. Immediately, close-up on the wire fence, he saw what he took to be one of the immature birds. It posed for pictures no more than ten feet away. As he drove on one of the adults sprang into the air from a dense clump of bushes about thirty yards away. It rose and fell back several times.

August at Camp Peary - Grace and Joe Doyle bird Camp Peary once each week to make this composite report: great egret, green-backed heron, mute swan, wood duck, black vulture, osprey, bald eagle, red-shouldered and red-tail hawks, kestrel, bobwhite, killdeer, greater yellowlegs, common tern, yellow-billed cuckoo, ruby-throated hummingbird, belted kingfisher, red-headed woodpecker, eastern wood-pewee, Acadian flycatcher, phoebe, great crested flycatcher, kingbird, purple martin, tree swallow, fish crow, brown-headed nuthatch, blue-gray gnatcatcher, wood thrush, cat bird, brown thrasher, cedar wax-wing, white-eyed vireo, red-eyed vireo, yellow-throated warbler, pine warbler, common yellow-throat, summer tanager, scarlet tanager, blue

grosbeak, indigo bunting, rufous sided towhee, field sparrow, eastern meadow lark.

ALBINISM IN BIRDS

(John Terres includes a section on Albinism in his classic work, Encyclopedia of North American Birds and that is the basis of this report.)

First of all, according to Terres, albinism in mockingbirds is not rare and the albino mockingbird in Drummond's Field would be classified by him as incomplete albinism. This means that color is lacking from the feathers and the eyes but not from the skin, as the legs and bill were clearly yellow in the picture of that bird. A completely albino bird would have white bill and legs.

He finds total albinism, in which the only visible color is pink in the eyes, to be the rarest sort in birds. The most common form of albinism is the appearance of symmetrical white patches, e.g., black birds with white wings or birds with white patches located symmetrically on both sides of the body. This leaves "our" mockingbird somewhere in the middle of likely types of albinism.

Mr. Guy said that he had seen a hawk make a pass at the albino. It eluded the attack. Terres confirms that the whiter the bird is the more likely it will be taken by a hawk. That's probably because the bird stands out so clearly against its background. Certainly, the bird stood out when viewed against the bushes in the back of Mr. Guy's yard.

Banding records indicate that albinism is found in about one half of one percent of the bird population.

NESTING-BIRD SURVEY OF THE BARRIER ISLANDS

By Bill Williams

The 26th annual survey of beach-nesting and colonial water birds was completed June 18-21. It encompassed all of the Virginia barrier islands, with the exception of Parramore Island, from Assawoman Island on the north through Fishermans Island on the south.

I am excited to report our finding a total of 80 white ibis breeding in two colonies, the first on

Fishermans Island with 66 birds and other with 16 birds on Cobb Island.

The recent northeasters had taken their toll on beach nesting species. Re-nesting was the order of the day at every colony we found except for the heronies. Brown pelican numbers were down from previous years, although 1400 to 1500 adults with many young on Fishermans Island was still a thrill. No white pelican was found this year.

We continue to find low numbers of black skimmers and gull-billed terns. Once very common breeders throughout the barrier Islands, both species are confined to only three or four sites now.

Of particular fascination was finding the crawl and nest of a huge turtle, probably a loggerhead, in June at Hog Island (not to be confused with the James River Hog Island). In thirty years of patrolling the islands this was a first for me.

Our daily bird list began each day with up to twenty marbled godwits just outside the Machipongo Station (on Hog Island). Two Wilson's storm petrels were seen off Smith Island.

A more detailed summary will appear in *The Raven*.

(The Raven is the semi-annual publication of the Virginia Society of Ornithologists and this survey is made each year by Bill Williams, Ruth Beck and Richmond birders, Jerry Avia and Bill Akers. They were accompanied this year by Ruth's son Michael.)

MESSAGE FROM BILL WILLIAMS

With all of the back-and-forth about probable migrants on the move, it is worth mentioning that the bird research operation at Kiptopeke State Park on Virginia's wonderful Eastern Shore are about to begin their 38th year. The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory will employ three research coordinators to run our facilities. Brian Sullivan, formerly our Hawk Watch Coordinator, will assume the duties of Raptor Banding Coordinator. Brian Johnson will return to coordinate the Passerine Banding Station that has processed more than 15,000 songbirds in the last two years! Calvin Brennan of Nova Scotia will be in charge of the Hawk Watch from the state's first

and most popular Hawk Watch platform. Will we surpass the 42,000 raptors seen last year? Will Swainson's hawks return after not being seen last year? What effects will the fires/drought out west have on bird movements in the east? Come to Kiptopeke to find out.

In addition, for the scaly-winged enthusiasts among us, come on over and help Mark Garland with his two-month effort to monitor monarch butterfly numbers and movements. Or talk to staff from the Center for Conservation Biology of the College of William and Mary, who will be comparing the energy and dynamics of two warbler species from Kiptopeke and Quantico. Do Eastern Shore passerine migrants, largely HY birds, encounter the same energy resources/expenditures on the Shore as those, presumably more AHY birds, that fly along the western side of the Bay?

Can you find more than 140 species of birds in one day in the Coastal Plain of Virginia? You are challenged to find out by competing in the Kiptopeke Challenge. How fast can you run a 5K when birds are around? The third annual Run for the Birds will tell you. Come on over. The birding is incomparable! Check out CVWO.org.

VSO CHINCOTEAGUE WEEKEND

Headquarters for Virginia Society of Ornithology outing, Sept 8-10, is The Refuge Motor Inn, P.O. Box 378, Beach Road, Chincoteague, Virginia 23336. Phone 800-544-8469 or 757-336-5511. Rates are \$72.69 for a single or double room. Extra persons are \$8 plus tax. Inform the motel that you are attending the VSO weekend...Meals are on your own with many places to choose from...Check in at the VSO desk where you can pick up the schedule of events and buy tickets that interest you....On Friday night a program will feature the life histories of 15 species of birds likely to be seen on the weekend. The program will include a synopsis of the field trips....On Saturday: two Safari Shuttles will take you to restricted parts of the refuge. Check in the VSO desk to confirm reservation and pay fee of \$8.00...Misty Boat Cruise travels down the Chincoteague Channel along exposed mudflats and oyster bars and costs \$12.50. These trips are also available Sunday, as are the birding areas at

Kiptopeke and Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge...Register to go with the VSO as soon as possible by calling Jerry Via at 540-951-7821.

SANTA BARBARA BIRDING

By Shirley Devan

On a family visit to Santa Barbara, CA, I carved out time for several visits to the Andree Clark Bird Refuge there, a fresh water pond area adjacent to the zoo. There are trails and dock-like bench areas on the water to get you closer to the birds. Most memorable of the sightings was the large number of black-crowned night herons. While I had only seen one previously at a great distance in the twilight in Florida, here I easily spotted two dozen or more under perfect conditions. What a treat! I also saw black skimmers and especially enjoyed the ruddy ducks in their brilliant breeding plumage with the prominent bright blue bills. California acorn woodpeckers were also quite common. This refuge was really a great place for some casual birding.

HOG ISLAND HUNTING DATES

Hog Island will be closed to the non-hunting public during September each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from dawn until 1 p.m. This accommodates the fall goose hunting season.

95 BIRDS FLEDGED AT YRSP

The bluebird season just finished for the 41 bluebird boxes at York River State Park. They fledged 86 bluebirds and 9 chickadees. Bird Club volunteers who took turns monitoring the boxes weekly at York River State Park from March to August were Dorothy Whitfield, Dorothy Geyer, Terry & Jack Johnston, Chris & Tony Dion, and Shirley Devan.

Wild Birds Unlimited in Williamsburg granted the Bird Club a generous discount, which enabled the Club to purchase twenty tubular predator guards for the Park's boxes. The volunteers installed these guards and provided nine more. The guards definitely contributed to the success of the bluebirds by decreasing the number of predators in the

boxes—particularly on the Meh-te-Kos trail. Nevertheless, snakes still found a way to get into seven of the boxes, several even after the tubular guards were installed! One of the goals next year will be to install predator guards on the rest of the boxes.

Highlights from the season:

Two boxes were paired to determine if bluebirds wanted an empty box or one containing an old nest. Experience at YRSP in 2000 indicates that “our birds” preferred an empty box.

A black snake was discovered in box #38 on May 7. The snake had just eaten six chickadee nestlings and was too fat to exit via the nest box hole. This box did not yet have a tubular predator guard installed.

Dorothy Whitfield and the Park staff observed mockingbirds feeding baby bluebirds in box #28 on several occasions during July. Needless to say, the bluebird parents were not pleased. Has anyone else observed this behavior at boxes in their yards?

Box # 14 had albino bluebird eggs in 1999 and 2000. Could it be the same female?

Box #15 (near box #14) had albino bluebird eggs a week after the birds fledged from box #14. Does this have any relationship to the albino eggs in box # 14?

Even though there were fewer bluebird attempts, the boxes fledged slightly more bluebirds this year than in 1999.

There was a dramatic drop in the number of chickadees fledged from 1999—only nine this year vs. 31 last. Predators got three of the five attempts early in the season.

During September, Shirley Devan will submit summary data to the VA Bluebird Society, which will submit it to the North American Bluebird Society and to The Birdhouse Network at Cornell’s Lab of Ornithology. Check Cornell’s web site at <http://birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse> to learn more about The Birdhouse Network and how you can submit data for the nest box in your yard.

Thanks go to the staff and volunteers at YRSP for their willing and cheerful assistance. Thanks also to the Bird Club and Wild Birds Unlimited for their financial support that provided predator

guards for half the boxes. And many thanks to the “bluebird volunteers” who spent many hours at the park with the bluebirds and chickadees.

If you want to join the bluebird volunteers next year, call Shirley Devan at 565-2352 (day) or Dorothy Whitfield, 564-0844.

Here are the summary results for 2000 and for 1998 and 1999 for comparison:

York River State Park Bluebird Trail	2000	1999	1998
Boxes Monitored	41	42	41
Boxes w/ no attempts	17	10	11
Boxes w/ 2 attempts	8	7	5
Predator incidents	7	14	NA
Total birds fledged	95	115	103

Bluebird Data	2000	1999	1998
Bluebird attempts	34	43	29
Bluebird eggs	129	181	125
Eggs hatched	110	118	90
Bluebirds fledged	86	84	68

Chickadee Data	2000	1999	1998
Chickadee attempts	5	9	7
Chickadee eggs	27	51	38
Eggs hatched	22	41	35
Chickadees fledged	9	31	35