



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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June - July 2001

## NEXT MEETING

We will not meet again until September 19 except for the group that goes to Craney Island in August with Ruth Beck. Editors also get a vacation so this is the last news letter until early August. That issue will have all of the details for the Craney Island Field trip.

## LOTS OF GOOD BIRDS AT YRSP

The May 19 Field Trip to York River State Park led by Lee Schuster must have delighted all seventeen of the participants. A total of 66 species were identified. Fifteen warblers included Parula, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-throated, Pine, Prairie, Blackpoll, Black and White, Redstart, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded, and Canada. Other summer migrants included Green-backed Heron, Osprey, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Eastern Wood-pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Wood thrush, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. The Blackpoll Warblers seemed to be everywhere and Lee referred to them as "a dime a dozen." You had to get your glasses on this array of birds fast as there were so many popping up. The Baltimore Oriole, on the other hand, did everyone a favor of appearing in the parking lot and staying plainly visible for a good ten minutes. An amazing number of these birds was seen in the vicinity of the parking lot.

The happy participants included Hugh Beard,

Ememedlo Bracalente, Camilla Buchanan, Betty Ann and Bob Caldwell, Meg Carb, Jim Coomer, Bettye Fields, Bill Holcombe, Marilyn Lewis, Carolyn Lowe, Mack Lundy, Alex Minarik, Sandy Petersen, Charles Rend, Dorothy Whitfield, and Marilyn Zeigler. There were many birders milling around and if we missed your name, we apologize.

## WONDERFUL PICNIC AT BECK'S

It is hard to say exactly what made this such an extremely pleasant occasion. Maybe it's because birders seem to so enjoy social time with other birders. Maybe it's because the Becks are such wonderfully warm and relaxed hosts. Maybe it's because the setting in the woods above the lake is so magnificent. Maybe it's because there are



Ruth Beck and a silent moment on the picnic bird walk.

always some interesting birds about. Maybe it's because Jean Armour, with a suggestion here a



nudge there, arranges for a glorious array of food and drink. Maybe, when you're sitting in the midst of all of that, it's because happy is the only way to be.

Heartfelt thanks from all of us to all of the contributors to this very special event which took place on Saturday afternoon-evening on June 2.



Bird Club President Hugh Beard trading tall stories with Joy Archer and Alex Minarik.



Jeanne Armour informs Lee Schuster "No doggie bags allowed."

## FIELD NOTES FOR MAY

*(We are interested in passing along information about seasonal changes in birds and any interesting behavior observed. Please call Bill Holcombe at 229-8057 or e-mail to [bowljack@aol.com](mailto:bowljack@aol.com).)*

April 22 (Sorry we missed this one last month.) Brian Taber, while on his hawk watch station at College Creek, saw a dark morph Swainson's Hawk. This is a very rare sighting for our area.

May 8 Tom McCary, on a walk around Lake Matoka, saw a female Black-throated Blue Warbler, a Summer Tanager, Wood Ducks and Wood Thrushes.

May 9 Alex Minarik and Marilyn Zeigler went on a "foray" to the Blue Ridge Mountains at the G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area in Fauquier County. The area was featured in the May issue of *Virginia Wildlife*. This area is also known as the "Linden Fire Tower." They started with a magnificent view of the largest field of trillium on the east-coast in full bloom. In those hills the foliage was still sparse and they saw several Cerulean Warblers and heard many more; saw a Worm-eating Warbler nesting on the ground; spotted Redstarts, Black-throated Blue Warblers, Hooded Warblers, and heard Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Buntings and Red-eyed Vireos.

May 19 Alex Minarik reported Bobolinks, Blue Grosbeaks, Orchard Orioles and Indigo Buntings at Hog Island..

May 22 Brian Taber hears a Bicknell's Thrush in his yard. (See his story in this issue.)

May 27 Shirley Devan had both Hairy Woodpeckers and Downy Woodpeckers on her suet feeder at the same time. "I felt quite fortunate to see them side by side. The Hairy *is* quite a bit larger with a clearly larger beak."

Month of May Grace and Joe Doyle hit a high count of 64 species on the weekly tour of Camp Peary on May 20. The richness of this birding area is perhaps best indicated by the migrants seen on all five of their Sunday May walks: Wood Duck, Osprey, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager and Indigo Bunting.

There were a lot of interesting items on the Virginia Birder e-mail:

May 2 Warblers found in one morning on the

Blue Ridge Parkway between mile 0 and 13: Golden-winged, Chestnut-sided, Yellow-rumped, Pine, Bay-breasted, Cerulean, Black and White, Redstart, Worm-eating, Ovenbird, Kentucky, Hooded, Canada and Yellow-breasted Chat. The numbers were amazing too — 36 Ceruleans, 59 Redstarts, 52 Ovenbirds and 14 Worm-eating.

May 4 The male Scissor-tailed Flycatcher arrived back in the area of the power-line tower where they nested last year near Culpepper. Karen Heatwole, who kept us informed last year, says that the pair weren't seen together last year until June. And a southwestern informant says the males appear first on nesting locations. On May 20 the female was observed for an hour or more, but there was no sign of the male on that day. Stay tuned.

May 13 Ned Brinkley reports from Cape Charles area that the barrier islands are full of birds. "Hundreds of breeding-plumaged Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitchers, Black-bellied Plovers, Semipalmated Plovers, Willets, Sanderlings and Whimbrels, with dozens of Oystercatchers, Spotted Sandpipers, Least Sandpipers, Semipalmated Sandpipers and at least five Piping Plovers. Strangely absent was Wilson's Plover.

May 15 Karen Heatwole reports first Dickcissel in the Culpepper area.

May 16 (It should always be this easy!) A report from Buchanan County, "We heard the song, stepped out of the truck and the Swainson Warbler flew to a Rhododendron branch in full view and began to sing. Watched it for five minutes."

May 18 Dickcissels in Fairfax County and Olive-sided Flycatcher in Orange.

May 20 The arriving migrants are always fascinating but the late hangers-on need attention too. Ben Copeland found two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in Newport News Park. He found the late-date of April 10 in his computer and wonders if others found this bird later than usual. (The late date in the Williamsburg Bird Club Annotated List is June 9.)

May 29 At the back Bay Nature-Wildlife Reserve in Virginia Beach, an observer found 80 species on a morning walk, including a Common Moorhen, three Least Bitterns, two White Ibis, King Rail with young and three Prothonotary

Warblers.

May 29 Crossing the James River on the Scotland ferry a visitor from South Boston saw two Black Terns "in beautiful breeding plumage."

## **BICKNELL'S THRUSH**

by Brian Taber

On May 22, after listening very carefully for several years to the Gray-cheeked and Swainson's Thrushes that seem to like my wooded yard at this time of year, I finally heard a Bicknell's. I have been studying its sound all winter and spring at website <[tantramar.com/bicknell/e/audio.html](http://tantramar.com/bicknell/e/audio.html)>

It was singing its rather unassuming song, with its rising-inflection at the end, during a light rain just before dawn. The species was split from the Graycheeked Thrush a few years ago. They have been banded at Kiptopeke in the fall and this spring at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge by the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory staff, on their way to and from breeding grounds in new England and maritime Canada.

## **COL. CRK. HAWKWATCH 2001**

The College Creek Hawkwatch is located two miles south of Williamsburg, where College Creek empties into the James River. This was the 5<sup>th</sup> year for the count. There were 938 hawks and vultures of fourteen species recorded there during 54 days and eight hours in 2001. That is the second highest season total (1997 was 1368; 1998 was 720; 1999 was 836; 2000 was 817) and the highest species total for a season. The number of days was a record high, though not the hours. The season ran from February 9 to May 25. There were twelve birds per hour for the season; however, the first half of the season averaged fourteen whereas the second half only averaged ten.

In February and March, the count was about average, but the first nine days of April were excellent (321 birds). The count appeared to be on a record pace with 765 birds by that date; however, the pace then slowed dramatically and one month later the total stood only at 895.

The season highlight came during the slow period,



when on April 22, the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive day of strong southwest and west winds, a dark juvenile Swainson's Hawk appeared. It came on the usual track, from the point at Hog Island toward the mouth of College Creek. It was quite low, less than 100 feet and only 200-300 yards away. It circled briefly after making landfall, as many raptors and vultures do at the site, then continued northward. I watched for about three minutes through the scope and had excellent views in good light. Interestingly, Maryland birder Marshall Iliff later told me that Maryland's only record of the species was also a late April date. This is the only spring record that I am aware of for Virginia. This was the 17th species recorded for the count.

In 2001, there were no Mississippi Kites, Northern Goshawks or Golden Eagles; however, a Peregrine was recorded on April 4, only the second for the count. Swallow-tailed and Mississippi kites were found only 30 miles away at the southern tip of the Eastern Shore in April and May, respectively.

The biggest day was April 4, with 103 birds, oddly, on north winds. The most species, eight, were recorded on both March 17 and April 5, in southeast and southwest winds, respectively.

The Osprey and Bald Eagle counts are, again, quite conservative. Often, there are ten to twenty of each species visible at once, fishing and circling, however, only those birds seen flying high and steadily north are tallied. Certainly, many of those seen were migrants. All but one of the Bald Eagles counted were immatures. There was an active Bald Eagle nest about 300 yards from the hawk watch and three active Osprey nests were visible.

#### Season totals

Black Vultures - 20	Red-tailed Hawk - 27
Turkey Vultures - 679	American Kestrel - 34
Osprey - 57	Merlin - 4
Bald Eagle (imm.) - 37	Peregrine Falcon - 1
Bald Eagle (ad) - 1	Northern Harrier - 27
Sharp-shinned Hawk - 36	Cooper's Hawk - 9
Red-shouldered Hawk - 1	Swainson's Hawk - 1
Broad-winged Hawk - 4	

Thanks again to Tom Armour and Bill Williams. This was the first year that the hawk count was officially a project of Coastal Virginia Wildlife

Observatory. CVWO brochures were handed out to a number of visitors from across the country, Canada and England.

## GOT AN ANSWER TO THIS MYSTERY?

For the last six to eight weeks club member Janet Craig has been hearing very strange noises near midnight that she identifies as bird sounds but not owls'. "Brings to mind the domestic rooster but it is a wilder, spookier call. The mystery bird has a three syllable call, 'Ah-Ah-Aaaaaaaaahhhhh. Ah-Ah-Aaaaaaaaahhhhh.' You can send Janet your best guess at [deca@infi.net](mailto:deca@infi.net)

## BIRD WEB SITES WITH PICTURES

There are several web sites that record with pictures and text the setting up of nests and the development of the birds with daily changing pictures. We discovered this a little late in the season: some of them shut down as the birds fledge. Reach this web site using the Google search, [www.jps.net/dnaprice/](http://www.jps.net/dnaprice/).> It lists five or six sites that you can call up and watch a daily report on the entire nesting experience starting in march or April, depending upon the bird.

Checking a couple of these we found that the Xcel Power Company, which has three Peregrine and one Osprey site, is still in business. The images were not great but that may just have been a bad day. The history is interesting and especially that the nesting birds that they are now photographing hatched from earlier recorded nestings. One of the female peregrines has been followed through five nesting cycles. You reach that site at [www.nspco.com/nspbird.htm](http://www.nspco.com/nspbird.htm).

We tried the Kestrel Box site which is located in Arizona. It was shut down, but promised to be back in business next spring. That one was <http://kestrelbox.org/about.htm>.

All of these sites or similar ones should start operating in the spring. You get the entire list by using that Google search site. Cornell had a family of Chickadees and [www/eaglewatch.com](http://www/eaglewatch.com) followed a Bald Eagle nesting.



# MAJOR FALLOUT ON THE CHESA- PEAKE BAY BRIDGE-TUNNEL

By David Abbot

*(Taken from the Virginia Bird E-mail Report, this is a vivid account of an eye witness to a migrating bird "fallout." Fallouts occur when flights of migrating birds are impeded by extreme rain, fog, or wind turbulence, or when the flights are extended over wide water obstacles.)*

At about 2 p.m. Saturday, May 19<sup>th</sup> I arrived at the CBBT. We were fourteen hours into a Virginia Big Day effort and after enduring pouring rain for nine of the first ten hours, it was apparent that (finding) 200 species would be a long shot. What we found happening on the CBBT was extraordinary. We spent the next five hours on islands 2,3, and 4.

I have been birding Virginia for over thirty years and the number of massive fallouts that I have witnessed can be counted on one hand; this one is likely to be the greatest. As we approached the meager vegetation on each island, the birds rose out of the grasses or shrubs, literally, in clouds. Warblers and others were scattered across the pavement from one end to the other, many unable to access the grass because there simply was no room among all the birds.

Those who were lucky enough to witness the event should record the details. It was truly a once in a lifetime event. The bulk of the birds were Common Yellowthroats, Magnolia Warblers, Blackpoll Warblers and Empidonax Flycatchers.

The highlights were many. Four Gray-cheeked Thrushes were around all afternoon. Among them, one Bicknell's was seen and photographed. The opportunity to study these birds side-by-side from all angles with no obstruction and at ranges as close as twenty feet has probably never happened in the field before. I took copious notes on the comparison and was able to show the bird to others. A Least Bittern with nowhere to go could be studied within a few feet as it stood on the grass. A Savannah Sparrow was probably a record late date for the Eastern Shore. At various times Yellow-bellied, Least and other Empidonax were sitting motionless on the ground.

Noticeable about the fallout was that it was made up of late migrants, such as Gray-cheeked

Thrushes, Empidonax Flycatchers, and especially the Yellow Warblers (possibly being *Aminicola*) indicating birds that breed north and northeast. The odd lack of Cape May and Tennessee Warblers, Philadelphia Vireos and others may indicate this as well. Both Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroats (startling numbers) have protracted migrations.

*(The reporter listed 39 migrating species in this "fallout" that included 350+ Common Yellowthroats, 90 Blackpoll Warblers, 18 Redstarts, 20 Yellow Warblers, 210 Purple Sandpipers, 20 Red-eyed Vireos and 15 Marsh Wrens plus wonderful "singles" such as Least Bittern, Black-billed Cuckoo, Veery and Bay-breasted Warbler.)*

## AN APOLOGY

A Club member called me to report that no May Flyer had been delivered and when she gave me her name and address I promised to send her a copy. I then proceeded to lose the paper with the name and address on it. If you will give me another chance, you will receive the May copy with the complete report of the Spring Bird Count. I really am sorry about that. — Bill Holcombe

## STUDENT RESEARCH GRANTS

There were two winners of the Williamsburg Bird Club's research grants this year. Each of them is awarded \$500. David DesRochers' work is entitled "Birds of Man-Made Salt Marshes." Kevin Kroll's project is titled "Habitat Use, Productivity, and Winter Dispersal of the American Oystercatcher in Virginia." Congratulations to these 2001 winners!