



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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NEXT MEETING

The next speaker will be another local ornithologist, David DesRochers, winner of last year's student research scholarship, who will present his talk "If you build it will they come: A study of constructed saltmarsh birds" in which he will explain how he used the club's scholarship to study the birds on eleven constructed marshes near Williamsburg and eleven natural sites. He found that wetland birds like clapper rails and red-winged blackbirds do use man-made marshes, but not all birds will accept these artificial replacements. Come and see the research the club is supporting.

The Williamsburg Bird Club next meets on Wednesday, October 17 at 7:30 in Room 117, Millington Hall on the campus of William and Mary.

Oh, and don't forget that the November meeting WILL NOT be on the third Wednesday, the night before Thanksgiving, but rather a week later on Wednesday, November 28.

A BOOK FOR BIRDERS & BIRD CLUB MEMBERS

"Red-Tails in Love" by Marie Winn

Published by Pantheon Books

This book is new to me but it was published in 1998, so maybe some of our readers already know it. Nor am I sure that my charter to write *The Flyer* includes book reviews. But I so loved this book that I can't imagine a birder, especially one in a bird club, who would not feel the same way.

Marie Winn is a New York City bird watcher who, with a gang of memorable characters, haunts the "birdier" reaches of Central Park. Both the birds and the characters seemed familiar to me as a member of the Williamsburg Bird Club. For instance, she frequently seeks out "one of the big boys" to answer difficult questions. She has groups that she can count on to get things done too and, like us, there are a several associates whose interest in birds is limited to one special type of bird or just one species. They are not formally organized into a club, but "the regulars" around whom the story flows, are very effectively organized.

The framework of the book rests on a story encompassing several seasons, of Red-Tailed Hawks nesting on ledges above the windows of an apartment house that faces the park. It is a wonderful story. Ms. Winn's love of birds and birding also takes you through the seasonal bird changeovers in the park. We can all relate to seeing "the first" or the "last" of the species as they arrive or leave with the seasons. And you will forever have another view of Central Park, one that differs from the dangerous, crime-ridden place with muggers behind every bush that most of us hear about.

The author has the enthusiasm and persistence of an Alex Minarik combined with the ability to make things happen like Ruth Beck. You sort of hang onto her coat tails as the various climaxes of the Red-tailed Hawk story emerge and she surmounts the crises and questions that keep popping up as Pale Male, the young Red-tail, pursues love and the hope of family in the center of the metropolis. The Central Park regulars set up schedules to provide 'round the clock observation and recording of all of the events and weld themselves

into an extremely effective organization. Ms. Winn is a writer with the Wall Street Journal. This book is written with an informal, action-oriented, flowing style, salted with a New Yorker's sense of humor that made it difficult for me to put the book down. Various parts of the book appeared in the Wall Street Journal as the events were transpiring and focused the entire city on this unfolding drama. If you would like to escape the tension of our current events for a while, this book is a good place to do it. The Williamsburg Library has the book and Barnes and Noble will get it for you at something less than the flap price of \$24. — Bill Holcombe

EVENT TO HONOR JOY ARCHER

Joy's friends at The College of William & Mary, where she was a member of the faculty for many years prior to her retirement, have scheduled an event honoring her and her contributions to the college and the community, on Thursday, October 11 at 11 a.m. A tree will be planted and a bronze plaque will identify it as planted to honor Joy. The timing of the event fits with Joy's present schedule at The Williamsburg Landing. This will take place at the east end of the athletic field near the intersection of Jamestown Road and Landrum Drive. It is across Jamestown Road from its intersection with Griffin Street where the Short-stop Restaurant used to be.

The many community organizations that Joy served will participate in this honor, including the Williamsburg Bird Club. You are invited to attend. Should you care to contribute to the occasion you can do so by making a check out to "Joy Archer Dedication Fund" and deposit it directly at the Sun Trust Bank where an account has been established. Alternatively, mail it to Carl Brown, 3694 Bridgewater Drive, Williamsburg, VA 23288.

Parking space is severely limited in this area and you are urged to car pool. You might even consider parking in the Merchants Square lots.

TRIP TO KIPTOPEKE

The Autumnal Equinox fell on this day and may have been responsible for the heavy fog that blanketed the trip from the Wild Birds Unlimited parking lot to Kiptopeke. It didn't really clear up

until about 11 a.m. This undoubtedly interfered with the birding but the group found some very nice compensations. The Hawk Platform sightings included Osprey, Bald Eagle, bursts of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, a Broadwing Hawk, Kestrels and a couple of Peregrine Falcons. One of the latter was seen attacking shore birds on the Bay-Bridge Islands. The fog apparently kept down the migrating song-birds. Only two were in the mist nets, a very rumbled Cardinal and a Palm Warbler. However, things were much better at the lake, where sightings included: Brown Pelicans, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Green Heron, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Wood Duck, Belted Kingfisher and a singing Clapper Rail. A cooperative box turtle even waddled into view. Birds were unusually scarce on the Bay Bridge islands where in addition to the Peregrine, only Ruddy Turnstones and Sanderlings were spotted. A total of 43 species was listed.

Reports from the eleven participants called the trip "a very pleasant day." They included Tom Armour, Victoria and Daniel Gussman, Barbara Phieffer, Susan Steinke, Randy and Jandy Strickland, Ken and Kathy Sage, Brian Taber and Marilyn Zeigler.

OCTOBER FIELD TRIP TO GREENSPRINGS NATURE TRAIL

On Saturday, October 20 the field trip will cover the Green Spring Nature Trail in back of the Jamestown High School. The trail now includes woodland habitats, the lake-like beaver pond and boardwalk paths through swampy areas. It can produce returning winter residents and tropical migrants still passing through from farther north. There is plenty of parking in the rear of the high school on a Saturday, so we will gather there on the right side of the lot for a 7:30 a.m. start. Alex Minarik will lead this trip.

GOVERNOR RECOGNIZES HAWK WATCHES

But Misses a Few !

Earlier this month Governor Gilmore's office issued the following statement:

"Certificate of Recognition

By virtue of the authority vested by the Consti-

tution in the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, there is hereby officially recognized:

Hawk Watch Week

Whereas, wildlife is an integral part of Virginia and serves an important role as both an educational and recreational resource; and

Whereas, hawk migration is an activity enjoyed by many individuals across the Commonwealth, especially in regions such as Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch, Snicker's Gap, and Harvey's Knob, which are among the best sites for watching birds of prey; and

Whereas, approximately eighteen raptor species have been observed at Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch at one time as hundreds to thousands of these birds pass through the region providing much satisfaction to their dedicated watchers; and

Whereas, Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch, established in 1976 is celebrating its 25th year of counting migrating hawks;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, James S. Gilmore III, do hereby recognize September 17-23, 2001 as HAWK WATCHING WEEK in the COMMONWEALTH OF Virginia, and I call this observance to the attention of all our citizens."

The Governor's proclamation was filed on the Virginia Bird List e-mail circuit by Brenda Tekin, Coordinator of the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch. Recognizing this hawk watching activity seems to be a positive step and we hope that they might do this every year. But we hope that next time they include the Kiptopeke Hawk Watch Station when singling out the state's important hawk watching activities. Perhaps Brian Taber's James River watch will be included in future proclamations.

HAWK WATCHING IN VIRGINIA

(With Brian Taber's talk on identifying hawks in September, the field trip to Kiptopeke and the Governor's proclamation, we thought that excerpts from Hawk Watching In Virginia from "A Birder's Guide to Virginia," compiled by David W. Johnston for the American Birding Association, would be appropriate. Ed.)

"From August through early December thousands of hawks that breed in the Northeastern forests and the Canadian maritime provinces move across New England into a relatively narrow corridor that brings them to Virginia, down the Blue Ridge

and Appalachian Mountains and along the coast.

In the mountains fall migration commences in August with the first southward movement of Ospreys, American Kestrels, Bald Eagles and Broad-winged Hawks. Major flights are underway by the second week in September. The highest concentration of hawks occurs early in the migration season when the Broad-winged Hawks move through the area in a three week period. It is the most numerous migrant. Huge numbers pass through September 12 to 22. Most will be Broadwings but the same thermals that attract their flights will be used by Northern Harriers, Osprey, Sharp-shinned hawks, American Kestrel and Bald Eagles. These thermals enable the hawks to "float" upwards and then to glide gradually downward for long distances until another thermal is found.

As Broadwing migration declines numbers of accipiters increase. By the first week in October Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks are at their peak. Hundreds can be seen in a day. Merlins and Peregrine Falcons, whose numbers increase enough to be expected once or twice a day, are most likely seen at this time.

After mid-October hawk watchers look for the "Big Birds." Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks appear in increasing numbers and the first Northern Goshawks show up, as do Rough-legged Hawks and Golden Eagles. Buteo numbers peak during the first week in November, when counts can be hundreds per day. Delaying weather patterns, however, can produce flights of several hundred, with hawks gliding through in impressive squadron formations. Most mountain hawk watches close by the end of November.

Along the coast flights have different seasonal patterns. Broadwings and other buteos are not so common but the numbers of falcons and accipiters are much greater. American Kestrels and Sharp-shinned Hawks are plentiful through September and early October, with the largest numbers being seen the first two weeks of October. Peregrine Falcons and Merlins appear in higher numbers at the coast and are seen in double digit numbers in early October. When Broadwings travel down the coast they move through at this time, nearly two weeks later than in the mountains. Coastal flights are mostly immature hawks of all species. The initially easier travel leads to the Gulf of Mexico,

a difficult crossing for falcons. They take a long detour through Mexico, necessary for accipiters and hawks that avoid water crossings.

When a full-time hawk counter was stationed at Kiptopeke in 1995 the results were astounding. Dawn to dusk counts throughout the season produced records for almost every species. Thousands of Sharp-shinned Hawks and American Kestrels and hundreds of Cooper's Hawks and Peregrine Falcons were tallied, numbers that mountain sites can only dream of.

Locations of the mountain sites:

Rockfish Gap at Afton Mountain by milepost zero of the Blue Ridge parkway near Waynesboro. **Harvey's Knob** is on the crest of the Blue Ridge, 15 miles northeast of Roanoke at the overlook parking lot.

Snickers Gap is located just past Round Hill on Route 7 at the intersection with 601.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

White-throated Sparrow — by Bill Holcombe

As of September 22 none of these winter residents has arrived here, ending a long trip from Canada or northern U.S., but they are coming. Our annotated list gives September 30 as the early date and May 28 as the late date for these birds in Williamsburg. Rather large numbers of these attractive visitors brighten up the winter with their alert, cheerful behavior and handsome appearance. Their winter vocalizing is usually limited to calls of "tseet" or "chink," but you can sometimes hear the sweet two-note song that has the haunting loveliness of some of the thrush calls. You will soon find them on the ground under your seed feeders or on the feeders themselves if they are not set too high.

Sparrows, with the exception of the English Sparrow or House Sparrow, are members of the finch family, *fringillidae*. (The English Sparrow is a member of the Weaverbird family.) Terres lists 34 sparrow species in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds*. All share certain characteristics identifying them as finches. Most sing from perches, are strong flyers and migrate in flocks. They socialize in small flocks during the winter but nest separately in the summer. They are monogamous during the nesting season. The female builds the nest and the male defends it. He

feeds the female during incubation and helps to feed the young birds. They have strong cone shaped bills adapted to cracking seeds. (Picture the Gold-finches and House Finches sitting on your feeder eating seed after seed while the small billed birds fly off to crack open each shell.) The White-throated Sparrow has a prominent white patch on the throat. That patch and the crown of the head striped narrowly in black and white or black, brown and tan make this 6 to 7-inch bird with the striped rusty brown back and sides and gray breast rather easy to identify. Sexes look similar. The white throat is duller and head stripes are brown on immature birds. The yellow spot between the eye and the bill and two white wing bars provide the finishing touches for identification.

The winter birds are usually in small bunches feeding under bushes or in thickets where they scratch for food under the leaves. Predominantly seed feeders, they also eat insects and buds of some trees. As the weather warms up the birds become more vocal and one of the whistled songs has been translated as "Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody" or "Sow wheat, Peverly, Peverley, Peverley."

These birds summer across Canada to the limit of the trees and in parts of northeastern and north central United States. They winter from Northern California, Arizona, New Mexico, Kansas, Missouri, and across to southern Massachusetts and south to the Gulf. Both males and females sing on the nesting grounds and the male is known to sing at any time of the day or night. The nest is built by the female on the ground at the edge of clearings and is well concealed under a bush or among the roots of a tree. Less frequently the nest is low in berry bushes or in small balsam firs. Nests are of coarse grass, wood chips, twigs, or pine needles and are lined with grass and deer hair.

Four to six eggs are laid in May. They are cream or blue-white or green-white and marked with reddish brown. The female incubates the eggs 12 to 14 days and the young leave the nest seven days after hatching. They are flying two to three days later. The usual pattern is for one brood a year. Some of the local names for this bird include Canada Bird, Canada Sparrow, Peabody Bird, and Peverley Bird. Banded birds have been recorded

in the range of eight to nine years old.

We hope that you see these white-throats soon and that you get to hear that wonderful two-note song. Same for us, too.

FIELD NOTES FOR SEPTEMBER

I can't tell whether our members have stopped looking for birds or have just stopped reporting them, but Field Note Reports have been mighty scarce. Please do think of reporting them when you see any of our winter residents returning, see the tropical migrants passing through, or any other bird activity of interest. Phone or write Bill Holcombe at 229-8057 or 4705 Lady Slipper path, Williamsburg, VA 23188 or e-mail at <bowljack@aol.com>. — Ed.

Sept. 12 – Bill Holcombe saw his first Ruby Crowned Kinglet of the season in Graylin Woods.

Sept. 15 – Phil Young spotted a Little Blue Heron in the pond behind The Golden Horseshoe golf clubhouse. Two days later he found a Green Heron in the same place.

Sept. 20 – Joe Doyle reports that 291 Bluebirds were fledged this summer at the Camp Peary Bluebird trail. He also reports the strange phenomenon that a Bluebird starting a box in mid-August is still tending it

Kingsmill – Tom Armour saw 150 Laughing Gulls (25% first year birds,) 25 Royal terns, one Coot (it's been here about two weeks,) also a Kingfisher that has been here for about one week, and no warblers in my yard yet! One Sharp-shinned hawk this morning(Sept. 26)

Camp Peary – Joe and Grace Doyle reported on their four weekly field trips during September to Camp Peary. Species count ranged from 42 on 9/16 to 33 on 9/23. Highlight was 9/16 with five Wild Turkeys, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Hairy Woodpecker and Palm Warbler.

Listed for the month: Great Egret, Mute Swan, Black Vulture, Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey, Northern Bobwhite, Killdeer, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Palm Warbler, American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Meadowlark and Brown

Cowbird.

From the Audubon – VSO e-mail Net:

Sept. 5 – Ned Brinkley believes that he has observed two Elegant Terns in Swan Cove at Chincoteague. A few days later this is confirmed. The last Elegant Tern in Virginia was also seen at Chincoteague in 1985.

Sept. 8 – A Pacific Golden Plover is reported at the Johnson Turf Farm in North Deerfield, New Jersey. This is only the second report of this bird on the east coast. It was feeding among a group of American Golden Plovers.