



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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## NEXT MEETING

The Williamsburg Bird Club next meets on September 18 at 7:30 in Room 117 of Millington Hall on the William and Mary Campus. Program Director Dan Cristol has arranged a wonderful program to open the new season of birding. Bill Williams has been walking the Greensprings Nature Trail virtually every week since the trail opened five years ago and most of the time at about the same time of day. The resulting story is a vivid description of the opportunities that the trail has offered and of the changes that have occurred over the five years of development. This is a story that birders will not want to miss. *(Repeat of last month's announcement.)*

## SEPTEMBER FIELD TRIP

Alex Minarik will lead the September Field Trip on the Greensprings Nature Trail on Saturday, September 21. This is the trail that Bill Williams will explore with us at the next regular meeting, with pictures and recollections. We will gather in the parking lot behind Jamestown High School and be set to start off by 7:30 a.m.

## KIPTOPEKE CHALLENGE

Williamsburg will be represented in this 24-hour team birding competition by Tom Armour, Fenton Day, Brian Taber and Bill Williams. The purpose of this event, in addition to providing a real challenge and a great day of birding to the participants, is to raise money for the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. Brian sends his thanks to all of those who have sent a donation supporting this team and reminds the rest of us that there is

still time to make a contribution. The money will be spent hiring biologists who lead the dedicated corps of volunteers in the work of documenting the fall and spring migrations of the millions of raptors and songbirds who pass through this most critical location on the Atlantic flyway each year.

The team asks that you send your check or pledge your support by September 15. Send checks made out to CVWO to Brian Taber, 103 Exeter Court, Williamsburg, Va. 23185 or e-mail Brian at [taberzz@aol.com](mailto:taberzz@aol.com) with a pledge specifying how much money per bird on their list you will donate. The numbers range between 101 and 138; e.g., .05 per bird = \$5.00 per 100 and \$.20 = \$20 per 100 birds. Our team has won this event on three occasions but hasn't done as well comparatively in the fund raising department. Let's give them a boost this year.

## RECORD YEAR FOR NEST BOXES AT YORK RIVER STATE PARK

By Shirley Devan

Forty-one nest boxes at York River State Park produced a record 116 bluebirds this season, one more than the previous high of 115 fledged in 2001. Eighty six were fledged 2000. Numbers of fledglings have increased each year since 68 bluebirds fledged in 1998. Chickadee fledglings rebounded this year — twenty fledged vs. only twelve last year.

Volunteers from the Williamsburg Bird Club monitored the boxes from mid-March to mid-August. Volunteers are Dorothy Whitfield, Dorothy Geyer (often accompanied by her mother,) Tony & Chris Dion (often with their children and grandchildren,) Jack and Terry

Johnston and Shirley Devan, (occasionally accompanied by her mother.)

Nest box data and results will be submitted to Cornell's Lab of Ornithology Nest Box Network and to the Virginia Bluebird Society.

Highlights of the season:

The Bird Club provided financial assistance allowing the club members to buy ten new boxes. The members adapted them for installation on existing poles and reinstalled guards.

- The Williamsburg/James City County Master Gardeners donated a bluebird box through their member Tony Dion.
- Twenty-five boxes had at least one nest attempt.
- Two boxes had both a chickadee attempt and a bluebird attempt.
- Four boxes had two bluebird nest attempts and one had three.
- Fewer eggs and nestlings were lost to predators this year, most likely due to repositioning of boxes away from overhanging trees.

Those who want to volunteer next season should contact Shirley Devan at 220-6269 (home phone).

## ACID RAIN LINKED TO WOOD THRUSH DECLINE

*(The National Academy of Sciences maintains a web site that provides abstracts of currently published scientific articles of broad interest in the Publication of the national Academy of Science. This is such an abstract.)*

New research published in PNAS this week (August 15) implicates acid rain in the decline of a North American songbird species. The Wood Thrush, a migrant bird species that breeds abundantly along the mountain slopes of the Eastern United States, has been experiencing a significant population decline since 1966. Research into the decline of most North American bird populations has historically focused on habitat loss and fragmentation as primary causes, neglecting factors like acid rain. To examine the relationship between acid rain and bird population decline, Stefan Hames and colleagues from Cornell University compared data collected by volunteers on

the population dynamics and breeding behavior of the Wood Thrush with reports of acid rain deposition and soil acidity. Using a statistical model, the researchers found a significant negative effect on the likelihood of Wood Thrush breeding. Factors such as high elevation, acid soil, and habitat fragmentation exacerbate the effect of acid rain on breeding behavior. These results suggest that although habitat fragmentation may account for some of the decline in bird populations, other factors such as acid rain play an important and often overlooked role. The research also demonstrates the important role that amateur volunteers can play in science, by helping to compile large data bases of information.

## FIELD NOTES FOR AUGUST

*(Please do call your bird sightings into Bill Holcombe at 229-8057 or e-mail to [owljack@aol.com](mailto:owljack@aol.com).)*

There were few field reports for this month. Tom Armour did call in a Black and White Warbler spotted in his back yard on August 12 and some of us were happy to see the Great White Heron and the Great Blue Heron join the large flock of geese from time to time in the pond at the Route 5 and 199 intersection. While she had to go all the way to the Algonquin National Park in Ontario to do it, Alex Minarik reported the most exciting bird of the month, a White-winged Crossbill. And in Charles City County Bill Holcombe saw two crows chasing a Barred Owl up the road.

Month of August – The ever faithful team of Grace and Joe Doyle reported from four excursions to Camp Peary a high of 52 and a low of 44 species: Great Egret, Green-backed Night Heron, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Common Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Wood Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Purple Martin, Fish Crow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Gray Catbird, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting and Field Sparrow.

However, VSO Bird net was active and we can get

a feel for what was happening in the state.

From August 8 through August 12 a Swallow-tailed Kite attracted many visitors to the Marriott Ranch in Fauquier County producing many "oooh's and aaahh's" from happy visitors who described this beautiful bird. We are not certain that this was a first Virginia sighting but certainly it was a rare one and record keepers were busy seeking pictures and detailed documentation via e-mail.

Aug. 11 – Black-bellied Whistling Ducks were reported on the Nansemond River in Suffolk.

Aug. 12 – Report from Chincoteague includes a good assortment of shore birds: Wilson Phalarope, Semipalmated Plover, Black-bellied Plover, both yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Terns (Forster's, Royal, Sandwich, Least, Gull-billed, Common, Black and Caspian,) Black Skimmer, Great and Snowy Egrets, Whimbrel and Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Most of these were seen in good numbers. A stop at Oyster added Marbled Godwits, Willets and more of the same.

Aug. 17 – Observer found 60 species at Craney Island with the prizes being a Red-necked Stint and a Wilson's Plover.

Aug. 19 – Hog Island held an Upland Sandpiper in the grassy field across the road from the tower. Five days later a birder following up on that report found three Upland Sandpipers in roughly the same area plus two Wilson's Plovers and a flock of Blue-winged Teal.

Aug. 25 – In one glorious morning in a back yard in Grundy, (way over in southwest Virginia) a Blue-winged Warbler, a Worm-eating Warbler, a Black and White Warbler and a Yellow-throated Vireo.

Aug. 30 – At Craney Island, a first reported unknown gull of dark brown and black was identified later as a Heerman's Gull, normally described as a west-coast gull.

Aug. 31 – A female Evening Grosbeak is spotted at Hog Island.

## **A GRUESOME HUMMINGBIRD STORY – WITH A HAPPY ENDING**

*(This story was reported by Thelma Dalmas, a well-known Virginia birder, on the VSO e-net.)*

A lady from Amherst County who runs about six hummingbird feeders had noticed that on one of her feeders hanging near a butterfly bush there was a problem with a Preying Mantis. This particular insect (she felt that it was always the same one) was very large and had a dusky green color. It would appear on the feeder, hanging on one of the perches. Sometimes she would see it hanging on the feeder upside down and at other times it would be perched there as if it were drinking nectar. Anyway, when it was there the hummingbirds avoided that feeder. She would go out and remove the Preying Mantis and the birds would go back to the feeder, but eventually the Preying Mantis would return.

In late July she went out one morning to change the nectar and found a dead hummingbird slumped over the perch of the feeder. The bird had wounds around the neck and a large deep, wound on its breast. She had no idea of what happened and thought that it may have died as a result of the fights that always go on among birds visiting the feeder.

This past Thursday (August 29) she went out to change the nectar and heard loud twittering (she said that she just knew that it was a distress call) coming from the direction of the feeder. When she got there she saw the Preying Mantis holding a hummingbird. It had clasped the bird around the neck and was biting at the breast. The wound was in the exact same place she had found on the dead bird in July. She ran to the house and back with scissors and cut the head off of the Preying Mantis and took the hummingbird. The wound did not look terribly deep and the bird was alive. She took it to a vet and the bird seems to be recovering. As of today (Aug. 31) the bird is alive and the vet has taken it home for the weekend.

Does anyone on the list-serve have experience or information about a similar thing?

*(I've heard the advice from naturalists to never interfere with nature but I've got to say "hooray!" for the lady with the scissors! Ed.)*

## **TABULATION OF CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS**

While Bill Sheehan kept records of each Christmas Bird Count and those who followed maintained a file, the data have never been assembled into a compact and useable form, despite lots of conversation – until now. Thanks to the automation of the Christmas Bird Count data bank by The Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab, that data bank can now be accessed on the internet and manipulated in several ways. One of the ways permits the downloading of the historical record for each participating organization. With very gracious help from Avery English of the Audubon Society we have our records starting with our first year of participation, 1977, and have them in useable form.

The format was determined by Audubon. Results are downloaded with five years of species and numbers-reported to a page. Each five-year period requires four pages and there are 23 pages in all with the addition of the last two years from our own records. The result has been fastened into a binder.

Those birders who have coordinated each of the nine areas of the count for many, many years (some from the beginning in 1977) will each receive a copy of this report. It would be expensive and probably not of general interest if we sent a copy to every member of the Bird Club, but we would like to make a copy available to any member who wants one. The cost to cover the duplication and mailing is \$3.00. Please mail your request to Bill Holcombe, 4705 Lady Slipper Path, Williamsburg, Va. 23188, with check made out to Williamsburg Bird Club.

## **FIELD TRIP TO CRANEY ISLAND**

We had problems similar to those reported by others on the VSO-birdlist: low water, distant birds and fewer birds usual. The drought had its effect. Nevertheless, we found some good birds. The highlights included: Whimbrel, many Black-bellied Plover and Caspian Terns for a total of 42 species. Josh LeClerc led the group of Tom Armour, David DesRochers, Alex Minarik and Randy and Jandy Strickland.

## **WINTER BIRDS RETURNING**

We will soon be seeing those birds that mostly spend their winters in this area and here is a reminder of what to look for — water fowl on the York, the James, Hog Island, Sunken Meadow and all of those little bodies of water scattered around us: Red-throated Loon, Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Tundra Swan, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck and Coot.

Song birds include: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, \*Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Savannah Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Rusty Blackbird, Purple Finch, \*Pine Siskin, \*Evening Grosbeak.

(\*These birds are infrequently seen.)