

THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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May 2002

NEXT MEETING MAY 15

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will be on Wednesday, May 15, at 7:30 in Room 117 of Millington Hall, William & Mary campus.

We haven't had a chance to see Tom Armour's outstanding bird photography for a couple of years but Dan Cristol has prevailed upon our resident master of that art to show us an evening's sample of his work. Along with the magnificent pictures we will hear Tom's stories about how the pictures came about and where they were taken. If you've never seen a collection of Tom's pictures you are in for a real treat. Don't miss this one!

ARMOUR LEADS MAY FIELD TRIP

Past experience would indicate excellent possibilities for a good array of warblers and other tropical migrants to be showing off at York River State Park on Saturday, May 18. Most of us never left the parking lot area last year. Nevertheless, we collected a good number of birds, topped off by a Baltimore Oriole posing in a nearby tree top for all to see.

The park opens at 8:00 a.m. We'll gather a few minutes later in the parking lot at the river end of the entrance road, near the rest room.

GREAT DISMAL SWAMP TRIP

This spring's warmer weather made for a denser foliage barrier to finding the birds than has existed for the last couple of years. In spite of this, between Alex Minarik's good ears and the group's persistence a good number of migrants were identified. These included Ruby-throated Hummingbird, White and Red-eyed Vireos, Louisiana Waterthrush, Catbird, Wood Pewee, Wood Thrush and Scarlet Tanager. Warblers included Prairie, Black and White,

Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Swainson's, Hooded and Ovenbird. Although the group had no trouble hearing the Swainson's no one was able to get this elusive bird in his glasses. Those enjoying this outing, led by Alex Minarik, included Brac Bracalente, Camilla Buchanan, Dale Davis, Bobbie and Ron Geise, Mike Minarik, Molly Peet and Eleanor Taylor.

SPRING BIRD COUNT

The 2002 Spring Bird Count held on Sunday, May 5 may have been the coldest spring bird count that the club has ever held, even though there are no temperature records to sustain the belief.

Just the same, the frigid birders did rather well. 152 species were reported for the day, with seven more within the count week. The species included three vireos, 25 warblers, 22 gulls and shorebirds, eight sparrows and an assortment of tropical migrants, including Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Orchard Oriole and Baltimore Oriole.

The organizer of the count was Brian Taber and the participants included: Tom Armour, Hugh Beard, Ruth Beck, Camilla Buchanan, Grace and Joe Doyle, Gary Driscoll, Betteye Field, Adrienne Frank, Bobbie and Ron Geise, Bill Holcombe, Julie Hotchkiss, Carol and Paul McAllister, Alex Minarik, Sandy Petersen, Mary Pulley, Lee Schuster, Dave Shantz, Bill Williams and Marilyn Zeigler. The complete chart of the results will be included in the next *Flyer*.

FIELD NOTES FOR APRIL

(Reports from members to Bill Holcombe are welcome at 229-8057 or at <bowljack@aol.com>)

The tropical migrants arrived in a steady stream in our area and in Virginia as the reports will show:

April 2 – Alex Minarik finds Purple Martins in Fords Colony and the next day sees her f-o-t-y *Northern Parula in her yard and hears Ovenbirds singing near Jolly Pond. Hugh Beard sees his f-o-t-y* Barn Swallow.

April 2 to 4 – Marilyn Zeigler and her neighbor, Rosemarie Tiefel, saw Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in their yards in Queen's Lake.

April 6 – Tom Armour gets a f-o-t-y* Cowbird on his feeder and finds a Lesser Black-backed Gull at the Kingsmill Marina.

April 7 – Alex Minarik sees five Glossy Ibis near a Ford's Colony pond and then spots a f-o-t-y* White-eyed Vireo.

April 8 – Tom Armour spots the first Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

April 9 – A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Catbird are added to Tom's early arrivals. Hugh Beard also finds a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and hears Yellow-throated Warbler, Ovenbird and White-eyed Vireo.

April 12 – Tony Dion watches Barn Swallows scouting his front porch for nesting sites and has a male Dickcissel in breeding plumage on his feeder several times. He also reports a large flock of Wild Turkeys favoring the same field on Rochambeau Road, between Croaker Road and Route 199 just east of an old motel. He has frequently seen between 14 and 20 in the morning and seven to nine at dusk.

April 15 – Alex Minarik has some more f-o-t-y's*, Prothonotary Warbler in her yard, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird the next day and a Wood Thrush the day after that. Dan Cristol has a f-o-t-y* Northern Parula Warbler.

April 24 – Bill Holcombe sees first baby Canada Geese on the Route 199- Route 5 pond.

April 25 – Dan Cristol reports first Red-wing Blackbird eggs laid.

April 26 – Carl Brown has a pair of "first ever" Rose-breasted Grosbeaks on his feeder.

April 29 – Bill Snyder on the Powhatan Creek has two pillars on his porch. The one on his left is occupied by a House Finch nest and the one to the right by a Phoebe nest. His Bluebird had the good sense to nest in the box provided.

April 30 – Rosemarie Tiefel has Yellow-crowned

Night Herons nesting in her Queen's Lake back yard which is certainly the most exotic nest reported this month. Dan Cristol finds his f-o-t-y * Blackpoll Warbler and Yellow Warbler.

May 1 – Dan Cristol says that the large colony of Black Vultures and Turkey Vultures that has occupied the water tower on Route 199 near Jamestown Road since last fall have joined the northward migration. There are just a few stragglers left.

Month of April – Grace and Joe Doyle listed the following species in four Sunday trips to Camp Peary in April. A high count of 60 species was made on 4/21. Birds identified include: Great Egret, Green Heron, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Canvas-back, Ruddy Duck, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey, Clapper Rail, Killdeer, Laughing Gull, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Hermit Thrush, Wood Thrush, White-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Palm Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Savannah Sparrow and Brown Cowbird.

*first-of-the-year

INTERESTING FIELD NOTES FROM VA-BIRD EMAIL

(With a little imagination you could scan the 375 entrees in the Va-Bird List for April and watch the bird life in Virginia change from the hopes of late March to the full flowering of early May. We'll try to give you a flavor of that without losing your interest in the detail. Ed)

4/09 – Woodthrush singing in Manassas and Chesapeake and Ovenbird calling in Gloucester County.

4/10 – Black-throated Green Warblers on the Blue Ridge Parkway and Chimney Swifts there and in Blacksburg and Manassas. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Palm Warbler and Black and White Warbler in Manassas.

4/11 – Chimney Swifts in Charlottesville.

4/12 – Harris Sparrows in Weyers Cave. It stayed

most of the month and was seen by many, including Alex Minarik. Bull Run State Park has Blue-Headed Vireos, Northern Parula and Palm Warblers.

4/13 – King Eider appears off of Chesapeake Bay Bridge and stays five days. Sedge Wrens are on the Eastern Shore.

4/14 – In Hampton, Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Veery. Gloucester County has Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Ovenbird, Wood Thrush, Louisiana Waterthrush and White-eyed Vireo. Buchanan County finds Black-throated Green Warbler, Palm Warbler, Black and White Warbler and Yellow-throated Warbler.

4/15 – Danville area reports Prothonotary Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Northern Parula and Common Yellowthroat.

4/16 – Augusta County has first Whip-poor-will report.

4/17 – Doswell (near Ashland) says, “Red-eyed Vireos everywhere” and adds Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager and Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Blacksburg finds first Wood Thrush. Whip-poor-wills get to Facyer County. Arlington has Vesper Sparrows and Rough-winged Swallows.

4/18 – Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Alexandria. Horn Mountain in Buchanan County has a cloud of warblers: Swainson’s, Black and White, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Orange Crowned, Tennessee, Yellow-throated, Blue-winged, Hooded, Parula, Worm-eating and Louisiana Waterthrush..

4/20 – Charlottesville reports first Indigo Bunting. Airlie (near Warrenton) has a big day: Worm-eating, Black and White, Northern Parula, Black-throated Green, Nashville, Ovenbird Warblers, Swainson’s Thrush, Hermit Thrush, White-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo and Red-eyed Vireo.

4/27 – James River Park in Richmond reports another big day: White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue-winged Warbler, Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Redstart, Prothonotary Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Orchard Oriole and Baltimore Oriole. *(Maybe we should consider a field trip to that spot some day!)*

Reminder:

GOLF COURSE CENSUS

The Virginia Society of Ornithology is studying the birds of Virginia’s 350 golf courses this year, in an attempt to find out which birds can use golf courses and which ones can’t. A new golf course opens every day in this country and we have no idea what affect this land conversion is having upon the birds. Over 70 courses are lined up with enthusiastic birders to cover them and we are adding new ones every day. The census will take place from June 1 through June 15 and we are still looking for a few more volunteers in this area. Email Dan Cristol at <dacris@wm.edu> if you want to be part of this project.

SHORT TAKES...

“Red-tails in Love” Revisited

On a vacation in New York last month, Shirley Devan visited the Central Park scene of the book, “Red-tails in Love” and found the story very much alive. Members of the Central Park birder’s group had scopes set up next to the boat pond and graciously allowed all comers, birders or not, to observe the famous window in the Central Park apartment house that the hawks had chosen for a nesting spot. Pale Male was clearly visible perched on a nearby building, watching over the nest containing two fuzzy nestlings. They had hatched a couple of weeks earlier. “Pale Male and his new mate, Lola were circling overhead as we left,” said Shirley.

Shirley said that the “regulars” were happy to share their stories of the red-tails, including watching them catch pigeons and take them to the nest to feed. “Pale Male is the same hawk that has been coming to that nest for the past twelve years and is featured in the book. Lola is his new mate this year. These have to be two of the most documented Red-tail Hawks in America. I’m sure at least one scope is focused on that nest every daylight hour. The regulars know when those nestlings were conceived, when they hatched and have a pool set up to guess when they will fledge. One photographer had a huge scope through which he had taken stunning photos of the adults and nestlings. A memorable day.”

WHOOPING CRANES LEARN TO MIGRATE

(A message from Alaskan birder, Thede Tobish)

First Year Whooping Cranes: It was their first solo migratory journey and they made it back home just fine. Researchers say five endangered Whooping Cranes recently found their way from Florida back to central Wisconsin.

The young cranes left their fledging grounds in Wisconsin's Necedah National Wildlife Refuge last fall, following an ultralight aircraft to winter grounds in Florida's Chassahwitzka National Wildlife Refuge. As reported by the Associated Press (4-19-02), the birds' instincts took over on the return trip. Their 1,175-mile journey took the cranes ten days. To learn more about these extraordinary birds, get a map of their migration route and watch a video clip, go to <http://www.amrivers.org/fishwildlife/whoopingcrane.htm>.

NO MORE QUAIL

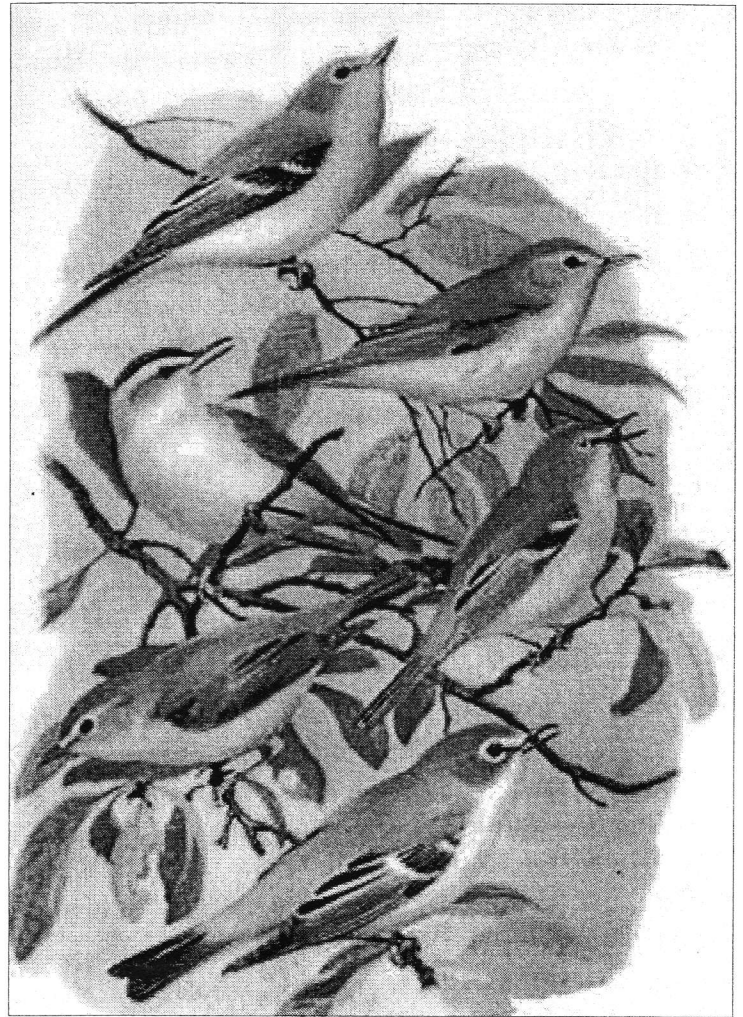
Bill Snyder, when calling in his report of nesting birds, wondered if I had heard or seen any Bob White or had reports of any. I told him that I had not and he replied that on his 15 acres on the Powhatan he has neither seen nor heard any in several years, despite a history of several coveys on that property. Bill theorizes that this is the result of the collapse of the fur industry in this country, which in turn caused a collapse in the fur trapping business in the United States. "When no one was culling the populations of fox, raccoon and opossum those populations multiplied and cleaned out the quail in their search for food." Sound very plausible?

BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Red-eyed Vireo by Bill Holcombe

The Red-eyed Vireo was once considered one of the three most abundant birds in the deciduous forests of eastern United States (the other two were the American Redstart and the Ovenbird.) However, more recent census studies cast doubt on this "most abundant" theory.

The Red-eyed Vireo is a small bird, 5½ to 6½ inches in length with a wing span of about ten inches. The upper parts are olive to greenish in



A variety of Vireos. Can you identify the Red-eyed?

color without wing bars and the under parts are white. It has a grayish cap and a white stripe over the ruby-red eyes and a black stripe through the eye. Both sexes look the same. This bird is a famous singer and no other North American bird sings so persistently. Some kind of a singing record was established when ornithologist de Kiriline studied a Red-eyed Vireo that sang 22,197 songs in a ten hour summer day. And this bird has also been known to sing at night! There are numerous interpretations of bird songs and Terres includes this one: "cherry-o-wit, cheree, sissy-o-wit, tee-oo."

This bird moves north through eastern United States from March into May from its winter home in South America. It summers across Canada and almost the entire U.S., except for the southwest. It summers wherever woodlands provide undergrowth of slender saplings or along edges of clearings, along streams, orchards or parks.

The nest is a dainty thin-walled cup built in the fork of a tree or bush two to 60 feet above the ground. It

is built of fine grasses, rootlets, strips of grapevine bark and paper from wasp's nests bound together by webbing of tent caterpillar or spider silk. Three to five eggs are laid May through August and incubation by the female takes eleven to 14 days. Both birds assist in the feeding and the male has a peculiar habit of swaying back and forth in front of the bird that he is feeding. (This can also be seen in the courtship behavior with the female.) The young leave the nest ten to twelve days after hatching. Unfortunately, the red-eyed Vireo is one of the most common victims of the Brown-headed Cowbird's nest predation.

Usually the birds forage in trees for their food, eating moths, caterpillars, bees, wasps and other insects carried by the trees. They also eat black berries, elderberries and fruits of the spice bush, dogwood, Virginia creeper and magnolia tree.

Common as this bird is and as noisy as it's reputation is, it can also be amazingly difficult to see and identify. It was found in all nine territories of the Spring Count. Nevertheless, I have only identified this bird once in my life. Maybe this says more about my birding than about the bird itself!

From the Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds by John Terres