



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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## NEXT MEETING

The Williamsburg Bird Club will meet next on Wednesday, October 16 in Room 117, Millington Hall, William and Mary.

Golf courses spring up at a rate of one per day in the U.S. and there are over 300 in Virginia alone. That's no surprise to those living around Williamsburg, a huge golfing mecca, but did you ever wonder what impact all of that turf is having on the state's birdlife? Finally, at long last, Josh LeClerc is ready to reveal the findings of the June 2002 Golf Course Bird Survey that so many club members participated in. Josh, with the help of 120 volunteers, scoured 88 courses across Virginia and turned up a surprising diversity of birds. Come to find out what was seen, what was missing, and what happens next with the study of birds on golf courses.

## FIELD TRIP TO KIPTOPEKE

There are lots of interesting bird reports on the VSO bird-mail coming from the eastern shore and Saturday, October 19 will be a good time to explore the area. Tom Armour will assemble the group in front of Wildbirds Unlimited in the Monticello Shopping Center at 7 a.m. Car pools will be formed and will leave immediately, as there is a long way to go. We will probably check out some of the islands on the bay bridge and then meet Brian at the Hawk Watch Station, where he will lead us around to the birding spots. While some of the southern migration will have passed, there should still be a good flow of birds. You will probably need to bring some lunch, a cold drink and bug spray just in case.

## ALEX AND THE VSO

*(Alex Minarik is a member of the Virginia Society of Ornithologists (as are many Club members) and recently reported on the spring nesting bird trip to Mount Rogers in southern Virginia. More recently she joined in their field trip to Chincoteague. Ed.)*

"I went to the Chincoteague field trip on the weekend of 9/6 – 8. On Friday I saw two life birds, a Black Tern and a White-winged Tern. On Saturday I got two more life birds, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper and an Olive-sided Flycatcher.

Chincoteague is a 3.5 hour trip from Williamsburg. The area is especially great for biking and seafood. I saw Ron and Bobbie Giese on their bikes there Saturday.

VSO membership is \$15 for an individual and \$20 for a family. They have at least four field trips a year and put out a quarterly newsletter. To join, make checks payable to VSO and send your name and address to Virginia Society of Ornithology, 1230 Viewmont Drive, Evington, VA 24550-2006."

## TWO GREAT BIRDING DAYS

*(Roger Mayhorn of Buchanan County posted two reports on the Va-bird list e-mail for September. Although his home is an impractical long distance from us in the southwestern corner of the state, his report makes very good reading for bird watchers. I've slightly condensed his reports. Ed.)*

September 10: I am almost afraid to post the following for fear that many people will not believe it. But I did see every bird on this list in or around my yard this morning. The cool 58 degree temperature may have been partly responsible for

my record breaking 48 species this morning, with 29 of those migrants.

Some of the more interesting were these warblers: Redstart, one Black and 3 Blackburnians, a Black-throated Green, a Blue-winged, 3 Chestnut-sided, 3 Prairie, a Common Yellowthroat, a Northern Parula, a Prairie, 16 Tennessee, 4 Yellow-throats. Other notable birds included: 3 Blue-headed Vireos, 2 White-eyed Vireos, 11 Scarlet Tanagers, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, 56 Cedar Waxwings, 3 Eastern Phoebe, a Great-crested Flycatcher, a Pileated Woodpecker, a Broad-winged Hawk and 6 Wild Turkeys. For anyone who doubts my complete list (*we did not print that*) I say come visit and see for yourself. I love this fall migration.

*(Well, we did not take him up on that invitation for a such a long trip, but some others did. Ed.)*

September 14: Four local bird clubs were well represented at the Warbler Watch at our house today in hopes of seeing a warbler wave come through. That never materialized, perhaps because of the misty morning rain.

Glen Eller was the first to arrive, just before dawn, and as we were talking in the yard a couple of Night Hawks flew low over our heads. Shortly, others arrived in time to see the first of 11 Tennessee Warblers that were to show up. Moments later a Yellow-throated Warbler gave us great looks from almost eye level and almost immediately was followed by a second Yellow-throated. Glen's sharp ears picked up the chip note of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak which then flew to the top of a Cedar tree where we all got good views. Then Glen's ears picked up an Eastern Wood-Pewee and a Great-crested Flycatcher. As we tried to find the singing White-eyed Vireo the group was treated to the first of two Magnolia Warblers that were to appear in the yard. On a short walk the Talbots picked up two Chestnut-sided Warblers, one Blackburnian and one Hooded. In the meantime, a Hooded Warbler landed in the Wild Cherry tree. The most cooperative bird of the day was a Yellow-billed Cuckoo that landed in the black walnut tree right in front of the visiting group and proceeded to change perches several times with long pauses in between. Five Gray Catbirds were spotted in the pokeberry patch and then a Red-eyed Vireo flew into the Wild Cherry

tree. There were also lots of the yard regulars at the sunflower feeders.

About 11 o'clock everyone paused for a lunch of fried chicken, potato salad, baked beans, pineapple-cheese casserole and hot dogs with chips. There were also mouth watering deserts like chocolate pie, triple fudge chocolate cake and key lime pie. I wish the rest of you could have been with us. (*Yeah, me too. Some day, maybe he'll let us pitch tents in his yard and be up at dawn with him. Ed.*)

## A PRESS RELEASE ON THE WEST NILE BIRD PROBLEM

**By Allison Fletcher, AP, Pittsburgh**

The West Nile virus, first spotted in this county in a sick cow three years ago, has now attacked at least 111 species of birds, including the Bald Eagle and the endangered Mississippi Sandhill Crane. Last year West Nile had been detected in only about a dozen bird species.

This year, hundreds of birds of prey, particularly Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls, have been found dead in the upper Midwest, said Katherine Converse, a wildlife disease specialist with the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center, in Madison, Wisconsin. About 400 owls and hawks died in Ohio alone in what one wild life official called "a major die-off." The carcasses were tested for the virus and several cases were confirmed.

The disease has also killed such birds in the wild as the Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Canada Goose, and exotic captive species such as the Macaw and the Chilean Flamingo, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.

"We don't know of any bird that cannot be affected by the virus," Converse said.

News that the virus is spreading in the bird population is frustrating for bird caretakers like James Mejeur, curator at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, because the illness is hard to detect, treat and prevent. Some institutions with captive bird populations install mosquito netting. "It's manageable for us because the majority of our bird population is inside," said Mejeur, whose

facility has lost three magpies and a crow this year. "But it is tough times for zoos and other places that can't control the mosquitoes and have large bird populations."

The horse vaccine has not been widely tested on birds but the few facilities that tested it found that it caused the birds no harm. Still, birds must be injected three times over a span of three months and is of value only in certain captive bird situations.

At the Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota caretakers have found that there is not much that can be done with birds showing symptoms except to give the animals fluids, antibiotics and special feedings that may help their immune systems. "However," said Pat Redig, the center's director, "many raptors infected by the virus die after the symptoms appear."

There is hope that hawks, crows and other bird species will develop resistance to the virus over time. "But we don't know how long that will take and how many raptors we will loose in the meantime," said Redig.

## FIELD NOTES FOR SEPTEMBER

*We received a response to last month's story about the hummingbird and the praying mantis. The letter follows:*

*"Bill,*

*In the hummingbird story in the last Flyer the writer asked for feedback on similar happenings. Phyllis Varner lives in Matoka Court in Williamsburg and is a fellow choir member at Williamsburg United Methodist Church. She once told me she had seen a preying mantis kill a hummingbird in her yard. My recollection is that she said that the insect bit the bird's head off! (She'd probably be happy to talk further about it, if that is wanted.) I probably would not have believed this, coming from anyone else!*

*An avid reader of the Flyer, Barbara Luck"*

*Phyllis Varner confirmed this story over the telephone and explained that it happened just about a month ago. Also, rather curiously, the scene of the hummingbird-preying mantis encounter was on and beneath a butterfly bush.*

While the tropical migrants and shore birds are showing up in the Virginia e-mail reports, few local reports have been received. But those received have been interesting:

Julie Hotchkiss reports that a neighbor in First Colony had a very rare sighting of a Black-vented Oriole. A great story might be how this Mexican bird that became a Texas bird in 1968 got all the way to Virginia. If you see a sort-of-Baltimore Oriole whose bottom is black rather than orange, that is what you are looking at.

On September 20 the Doyles saw an immature Rose-breasted grosbeak visiting their yard.

Joe Doyle also sent me a fascinating item from the Shenandoah Overlook Visitors Guide, "Falcon Trak," a multi-partner project, that tracks the travels of newly released Peregrine Falcons. Through the project, scientists hope to learn more about this elusive bird of prey. Tiny satellite transmitters fitted on the falcons released in several areas of the Shenandoah National Park in spring 2001, let us know that three headed south, two went north and two stayed close to home in Maryland and Virginia. One adventurous Peregrine went all the way to the Dominican Republic for the winter. What a commute! This particular Peregrine left the Outer Banks of North Carolina and flew straight through to the Bahamas in less than twelve hours! That is doing 720 miles at about a speed of 60 miles per hour! Shenandoah plans to release five more young Peregrines this spring that will be fitted with transmitters.

The Doyles got in only two birding trips to Camp Peary this month and spotted 39 species on one trip and 37 the other. Here are the highlights: Great Egret, Black Vulture, Clapper rail, Killdeer, Laughing Gull, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Tree Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Marsh Wren, White-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Summer Tanager, Rufous-sided Towhee and Bobolink.

Mid-month, Bill Holcombe watched four Wild Turkeys parade across the Graylin Woods walking path and we assume the Wild Turkey family is still wandering through Alex Minarik's back yard.

## SHORE BIRDS: LONG DISTANCE MIGRATORS

*(From The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds by John Terres.)*

The Arctic Tern makes one of the longest and most spectacular of all migration journeys, one of the most striking in the avian world. In North America it nests from Greenland and islands in the Arctic, Alaska, and Canada south to Massachusetts and migrates to the Antarctic, with some of them going from polar cap to polar cap. Those that nest in eastern Canada, for example, start their autumn journey by crossing the Atlantic to Europe, then fly southward along the west coasts of Europe and Africa and reach wintering range off southern Africa and beyond to the Antarctic Circle. This is an annual round trip of 22,000 to 25,000 miles.

Many shore birds are long distance migrants; some go to the West Indies and Central America to spend the northern winter. Others fly deep into South America to high Andean lakeshores and along both coasts. Some of the surf-birds that winter along 12,000 miles of Pacific coast travel about 24,000 miles in their annual migrations. The White-rumped Sandpiper migrates from the Canadian Arctic to Tierra del Fuego and to the Falkland Islands which is about 8,000 to 9,000 miles each way each year. The Baird's Sandpiper annually travels from its Arctic nesting grounds to Patagonia and back. The Red Knot flies from Arctic Canada to the Straits of Magellan and back for about a 19,000 miles round trip. The Pectoral Sandpiper nests in Siberia, Alaska, Arctic Canada and migrates mostly through interior U.S., but less commonly along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts to the southern parts of South America.

But of all North American shorebird migrations, the American Golden Plover's has been publicized as one of the more interesting. It travels in an enormous loop over the New World. After nesting in the tundras of Alaska and Northern Canada, these plovers assemble in Labrador to start the 2,400-mile flight over the ocean to the Brazilian coast. Then they fly onward through Brazil and Uruguay and spend the northern winter on the Argentine pampas. On their spring northward return they travel a different course. This one takes them over the northwestern corner of

South America and Central America and up the Mississippi Valley to their tundra breeding grounds, some 8,000 miles north of their winter quarters. Their entire route is a giant ellipse with a north-south axis of 8,000 miles and an east-west axis of 2,000 miles.

*(Something to think about the next time that you spot one of these birds on Hog Island or Craney Island. Ed.)*

## VIRGINIA HAWK WATCHES

While there may be other Hawk Watches in Virginia, four had reported their September figures as of press time. Most of the hawk watch stations start their fall count in August and continue at least weekly counts through November.

Starting in the north is Snicker's Gap, in the hills 20 miles west of Leesburg. Next is Chandler's Mountain in the Piedmont near Lynchburg. Then comes Harvey's Knob north of Roanoke at mile post 95.4 on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Across the state on the Eastern Shore is the Hawk Watch at Kiptopeke.

If all of these report their year-to-date figures again in November, a comparison may be interesting:

Last Report Date	9/22	9/23	9/23	9/23
	<u>Sn. Gap</u>	<u>Chand.Mtn.</u>	<u>Harv.Knob</u>	<u>Kipto.</u>
Turkey Vulture	0	0	0	23
Black Vulture	0	0	0	7
Osprey	150	50	130	269
Bald Eagle	57	6	49	24
Northern Harrier	32	5	18	55
Sharp-shinned Hawk	230	23	86	153
Cooper's Hawk	37	2	17	74
Northern Goshawk	0	0	1	0
Red-shouldered Hawk	10	0	1	1
Broad-winged Hawk	2482	2353	6008	31
Red-tailed Hawk	42	0	40	6
Golden Eagle	0	0	1	0
American Kestrel	38	14	33	512
Merlin	5	0	1	29
Peregrine Falcon	7	0	6	1
Unknown	32	9	0	0
Mississippi Kite	0	2	0	0