



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Williamsburg Bird Club will take place on the third Wednesday, October 15, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 of Millington Hall on the campus of William and Mary. As Isabel wiped out our September meeting (along with an awful lot of other things) Josh LeClerc, a master's degree candidate working with Dan Cristol, will present the results of his two year study of the relationship of Bluebirds and golf course habitats at the meeting.

OCTOBER FIELD TRIP

Tom Armour says that the Isabel cancelled September field trip to Kiptopeke will take place October 18. We will meet in the Colony Shopping Center parking lot up from the Fresh Market at 7 a.m. and leave as soon as we've sorted out the cars and passengers. You will need a lunch and beverage as we may not be back 'til 2:00 – 2:30.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count is always the second Sunday before Christmas, except when Christmas falls on Sunday. Then the count is scheduled for the Sunday before Christmas. This early "heads up" is for all of those folks who never miss participating in the count and for all of those who would like to join this western hemisphere event which will celebrate its 102nd year in 2003. Details will be in next month's *Flyer*.

JUST A FEW FIELD NOTES FROM LAST MONTH

(I left on vacation Aug. 31 and some of the material that I thought that I had e-mailed to Phil Young didn't go through. But these are good reports so better late than never. B. Holcombe)

August 14 – Tom Armour reports that Yellow-crowned Night Herons are again nesting at Kingsmill. He saw three young in a large pine-tree nest that "look ready to fledge any day." (See accompanying story from homeowner.)

Aug. 18 – Tom Armour at Hog Island found three Black-bellied Sandpipers, five Greater Yellowlegs, one Kestrel, a Coopers Hawk, three immature Bald Eagles, three Blue Grosbeaks and a really great find, a White Pelican. This species seems to show up there every two or three years. We learned later from Mitchell Byrd that the White Pelican had been hanging around for almost a month.

August 19 – Shirley Devan sends her wrap-up report for the year of tending the York River State Park Bluebird Trail, including the good and the bad:

"Dorothy Whitfield and I checked boxes 18 and 37 Sunday afternoon. 'The Good News' is that four Bluebirds fledged out of box 37. The 'Bad News' is that nestlings in box 18 appear to have been abandoned. We found a foul smelling nest swarming with beetles with a few decayed bird parts. Yuk! We couldn't get the bag to the trash can fast enough! But other 'Good News' came when we heard a Barred Owl hooting at about 5:30 in the afternoon as we were commiserating about box 18.

And so ended the 2003 Bluebird year for us. Totals are 24 Chickadees fledged compared to 20 last year and 56 Bluebirds fledged, quite a bit below last year's record 116. The Bluebirds seemed to have a tough time getting started this year.

Now that the season is over it is time to celebrate the new birds that did fledge. I'll be calling the whole crew next week to confirm that you'll be attending the picnic Saturday, September 6 at the park.

Thanks for all of the good help this season. Let's hope for better weather next year – for the birds and for us.”

September 11 – Bill Holcombe finally gets his 200th bird of the year, a Golden Eagle above the Popo Aggie River in Wyoming....and finds out that it is pronounced “Papaggie.”

September 31 – Joe Doyle reports some late month sightings in Kingsmill; Oven Bird that hit a window and sat on their deck for a couple of hours, Northern Parula, Red-eyed Vireo and a Baltimore Oriole.

HURRICANE ISABEL BIRDS

(We recently mentioned a report of hurricane birds that had appeared in the VSO Raven Publication and we now include some very up to date special bird sightings from Isabel.)

1. Starting off close to home is Bill Williams' report of a “morning after” observation at the Jamestown Ferry dock of ten Black Skimmers, a Sanderling and an exhausted White-rumped Sandpiper resting on the dock itself.

2. Ned Brinkley, well known birder from Cape Charles gave this “next day report” made essentially from the CBBT islands.

“A very quick rundown of species seen today 0705 – 0745: Black-capped Petrel (5), Bridled Tern (99), Pomarine Jaeger (2), Parasitic Jaeger (3), Leach's Storm-Petrel (9), Band-rumped Storm-Petrel (17), Oceanodroma, (spelling questionable), (45). Wilson's Storm-Petrel, (many, but not yet tallied), Phalarope (4), Sooty Tern (very probable), Cory's Shearwater (12), White-tailed Tropicbird (1), Herald Petrel (1). Many observers got very good looks at these

birds.....The spectacle of hundreds of butterflies and shorebirds streaming across the Bay all day was unforgettable.” *(Many of us could have vastly increased our life lists with these sightings!)*

3. Rockingham County's first ever report of a Black Skimmer and the first Laughing Gulls since 1977.

4. First Black Skimmer ever reported in Augustus County near Stuart's Draft. Laughing Gulls also accompanied this Skimmer.

5. Stopped dead by a traffic jam on 64, this observer trying to reach the CBBT headed inland and at Airlie Reservoir in Fauquier County found Leach's Storm-petrel (1), Red-necked Phalarope (2), Common Tern (10), Sandwich Tern (1), Laughing Gull (11). At Lake Manassas in Prince William County she recorded Common Tern (45), Sandwich Tern (2), Caspian Tern (2), Black Tern (1), Laughing Gull (lots of them), Marbled Godwit (1), Western Sandpiper (1), Semipalmated Sandpiper (3), Pectoral Sandpiper (3).

6. In Amherst County in the shadow of the Blue Ridge an observer found Roseate Tern (1), Black Skimmer (1), Royal Tern (20) Common Tern (2), Caspian Tern (1) and commented on the unusual sight of the Black Skimmer “skimming” the water with the Blue Ridge background.

7. There was a Black Tern on Nabisco Creek in Woodbridge.

8. A few days after “the day after” a Richmond observer at Swift Creek Reservoir in Chesterfield County reported Royal, Caspian, Common and Forster's Terns, two Wilson's Storm-Petrels and was looking at either Sooty or Bridled Terns that were too far away for certainty.

This is not the complete report on the Va-bird Listserve but the sample gives a good idea of the ocean and shore birds that were blown to strange habitats.

KIPTOPEKE CHALLENGE

by Brian Taber

(This was another story in the second batch of copy sent to Phil Young last month, that never got there. As Brian had prepared it as preliminary to an event that happened September 28th I have modified it somewhat.)

There are a couple of special things about this year's Kiptopeke Challenge. First of all, the Williamsburg teams dedicated their efforts this year to the memory of good friend and long time naturalist, birder and club member, Julie Hotchkiss, who passed away February 2003. Julie was a warm friend to everyone in the club who met her and an enthusiastic supporter of our bird counts.

After several years of the club being represented by the team of Tom Armour, Fenton Day, Bill Williams and myself, Tom, Bill and I decided to form separate teams. Isabel postponed the event by a week and the closing of William and Mary took Bill's team out of the area. How all of the participating teams did will be announced at the Eastern Shore Birding Festival, Friday October 3.

The main purpose of this event, beyond supplying an exciting time for the participants, is to raise money for the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory which can only function with the support of the birding community. I urge you to pick a team to support and make a contribution of whatever amount seems comfortable to you. You may do so by sending your contribution to Tom Armour, 3013 Spotswood Cay, Williamsburg, VA, 23185, or to me, Brian Taber, 103 Exeter Court, Williamsburg, VA. 23185. You will all receive a complete report of the team's findings.

The need for long-term studies such as those conducted by the observatory are more critical than ever. The widespread destruction of habitat at both ends of the migratory trails in North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean effect song birds, hawks and all other birds that nest and winter in these areas. The populations of many species of birds have been in serious decline over the past few decades and we now have the potentially devastating effects of the fast spreading West Nile Virus to contend with. The many forms of pollution have been and remain threats. You can play a part in the efforts to study the effects of these threats and to help find corrections for them with even a modest contribution.

We all greatly appreciate your last year's support when the overall effort raised a total of \$6,000. We hope that you can again offer your support.

(We do hope that the Club will give good support

to this effort. Ed.)

MEMBER'S STRANGE BIRD STORY

By Arlene Sego

I keep reading about unusual bird situations in the *Flyer* and thought I could add to the list.

We have a nest of Yellow-crowned Night Herons next to our driveway and by the corner of our neighbor's house here in Kingsmill. There are three young ones that are just beginning to stretch their wings and hop around on adjacent branches. They are probably 30 feet up in a pine tree in one of the sloppiest excuses for a nest we have ever seen.

A little background on this: Earlier this summer we had a heron digging bugs out of our lawn which is next to the street. We thought that it was a little lost since we are not close to any body of water here. Then we would see a heron flying low over our driveway. We again assumed that it was a little disoriented but couldn't follow where it was going. Sometimes it just sat in a tree watching us as we watched it, kind of like Dr. Seuss's bee-watcher-watcher watching a bee-watcher.

Then about a month ago we joined our neighbors in trying to find a dead and decaying animal that was badly smelling up our yards. Our neighbor happened to look up and discovered the nest. The smell of the droppings leaves much to be desired, which is why we thought there had to be a dead animal around! Now that the little ones are venturing to adjacent trees they are widening the circle of their droppings and the odor. Obviously we hope they will move on soon, preferably to a distant body of water. The high heat and humidity certainly don't help matters.

My husband and I have been club members for several years but as yet have not gotten to any of the meetings. We do enjoy the newsletter and news of area birds. Maybe one of these days we'll get to put faces with the names about which we keep reading.

(We thank you, Arlene Sego, for sharing your story and writing it so well. The editors.)

BIRD FAMILY OF THE MONTH

The Storm-Petrels

The Storm-Petrels are pelagic birds rarely seen in Virginia unless a storm such as Isabel drives them to the shore or even further inland. We really don't hear much about pelagic birds unless Brian Pattison, who sponsors sea-going trips off the Virginia coast to view these birds, visits the club. Pelagic birds are those which spend their lives at sea except for the time spent mating, nesting and raising young. Storm-Petrels are a distinct family containing 22 species that range over the world's oceans and twelve of these are reported in North America. (There are other petrels that are not only separate species but also belong to the Shearwater Family to which the Storm-Petrel Family is more distantly related..)

The name "petrel" is a diminutive of Peter (little Peter) and sailors labeled these birds because of a feeding habit. When the birds hover above the surface to feed, they often patter their feet on the surface. The name refers to the Bible story of Peter walking on the water with help from Jesus.

These are the smallest of sea-birds, ranging from 5 ½ to 10 inches long.

Other seamen's folklore has referred to them as Mother Carey's Chickens. Many follow ships at sea to pick up bits of animal fats or oils. Any small black bird with white rump patches fluttering near the sea is a Storm-Petrel.

All are more or less dark with white on the rump or under-parts. They have slender hooked bills in which nostrils open in a single tube on top of the bill. Legs are slender and usually rather long in proportion to their sizes. Feet are webbed. They may roam the sea singly but more often in scattered flocks. Their sudden appearance in windy weather seemed to indicate to sailors a coming storm.

Sexes are outwardly alike. They may nest in colonies of thousands on marine islands or islets. Banding has shown that older breeding birds are first to return in the spring and pairs return to the same nesting hole or rock crevice year after year. Birds are thought to mate for life. Both birds work at digging nesting burrows that can be 2 to 3 feet deep. The female lays one white egg. Incubation can take 5 to 7-1/2 weeks (*which seems incredibly*

long compared to our forest and field nesting birds.) When they are nesting Storm-Petrels visit the nest at night and spend the day at sea foraging. Chicks are fed by both birds. When handled or otherwise disturbed, adults defensively discharge oil from mouth and nostrils.

North American Storm-Petrels include: Storm-Petrel, Ashy Storm-Petrel, Black Storm-Petrel, Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, Galapagos Storm-Petrel, Guadalupe Storm-Petrel, Harcourt's Storm-Petrel, Leach's Storm-Petrel, Least Storm-Petrel, White-bellied Storm-Petrel, White-faced Storm-Petrel and Wilson's Storm-Petrel. As noted in the Isabel report, both Leach's and Wilson's Storm-Petrels were identified after the storm.

Leach's Storm-Petrel is extremely wide spread nesting in the Aleutians, Alaska and on Pacific islands south to Baja and in the Atlantic nests from Labrador south to Newfoundland, Maine and Massachusetts. Leach's Storm-Petrel nests in the southern hemisphere and summers north to the Arctic after dispersing into the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. It is thought by some ornithologists to be the most numerous of bird species.

Reference: The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds by John K. Terres.