

THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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October 2005

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Alex Minarik

I guess I was still in shock over the six condors that we had seen flying over Big Sur that morning, or maybe I was distracted by the Steller's jay that was pecking at the apple that I left momentarily unguarded as we prepared for an afternoon hike through the redwood forest. Whatever it was, I forgot to put the field guide in the backpack. When I am birding in unfamiliar territory, my field guide gets a lot of use. As soon as I see a new bird, I quickly try to look it up before it flies away, often missing the critical field mark that I need to make the identification. But on this hike I had to rely on memory, so I found myself studying every detail of the birds' appearance and behavior more than I have ever done before. I was surprised at how well I could find most of the birds in my guide once we returned to the car because I had made such careful observations. It was a good lesson.

OCTOBER 19 MEETING

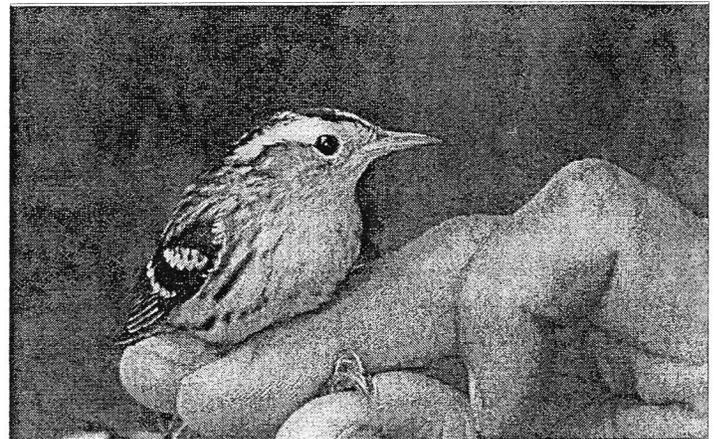
Plan to join us Wednesday, October 19 to learn about Virginia's Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Aimee Weldon, Program Coordinator for Virginia IBAs, will present the program. IBA is not an "Important Birding Area" - it is an "Important (for) Bird Area". In other words, it's about the birds! Important Bird Areas are sites that provide essential habitat for one or more species of birds. IBAs include sites for breeding, wintering and/or migrating birds. IBAs may be a few acres or thousands of acres, but they are usually discrete sites that stand out from the surrounding landscape.

Aimee Weldon has a Master's Degree in Avian Ecology. She also participated for the first time in the annual Kiptopeke Challenge in September on the Wild Birds Unlimited Team with Brian Taber and Paul Nasca.

The meeting will begin 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 at Millington Hall at William and Mary.

OCTOBER 22 FIELD TRIP

Tom Armour will lead the October 22 (Saturday) trip to Jamestown Island via the Colonial Parkway. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Colony Square Shopping Center (near The Fresh Market) on Jamestown Road. If you don't have an annual pass to Jamestown Island (through National Park Service or the APVA) be prepared to pay \$8 per person at the entrance.



Black and White Warbler photo photographed at Kiptopeke.

CORRECTION TO WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED CONTRIBUTION

In the September issue of *The Flyer*, the amount of the contribution from George and Val Copping, owners of Wild Birds Unlimited, was incorrect. Their contribution to the club for January - June this year should have been stated as \$177.50. This amount represents 5% of the purchases by Bird Club members for this six-month period.

Many thanks to George and Val and the staff at WBU for their support. Remember: when you purchase items at the store, identify yourself as a Bird Club member so that a portion of your purchase will be set

aside for the club. Thanks to all!

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBER

The Club welcomes W&M student Anne Condon as a new member. Anne, we look forward to seeing you at upcoming events.

SEPTEMBER BIRD SIGHTINGS

Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Shirley Devan at 220-6269 (home phone) or sedevan52@cox.net (home email). If you encounter interesting birds on your vacation/travels, please share!

September 4: Bill Williams reports: "Green Springs Trail was very generous with her birds Sunday, with 70 species. Predawn was an auditory delight with a calling Barred Owl and fly-over Veerys and Swainson's Thrushes. Wood Thrushes called softly from the forest. A common Nighthawk swept by the tennis courts at first light. Daybreak brought 3 Baltimore Orioles, and then a Canada and a Worm-eating Warbler in view simultaneously. Two hatch-year Cooper's Hawks harrassed Starlings near the board walk, then were pestered themselves by an Eastern Kingbird."

Eleanor Young reports from the Hampton Roads Bird Club Bird Walk at Newport News Park: 27 species, including Carolina Wren, Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Goldfinch, Downy Woodpecker, Laughing Gull, American Robins, Carolina Chickadee, Eastern Bluebirds, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Osprey, American Crow, Great Crested Flycatcher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Brown-headed Cowbirds, Acadian Flycatcher, Northern Cardinals, Mourning Doves, Chipping Sparrows and Mallard.

September 11: Bill Williams reports: "The birding on Green Springs Trail proved to be tough going, especially as the northeast wind increased. Nevertheless, there were the following of note:

1 Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (the second trail record); 1 Traill's (Alder/Willow) Flycatcher— a first for the trail!; 13 Veerys and 1 Swainson's Thrush flying over before dawn. The Traill's name is applied to Willow and/or Alder Flycatcher when the bird cannot be separated by voice."

Marilyn Zeigler reports that she got a great look at an American Bittern at Jamestown Island about 5:00 p.m., plus a Red-headed Woodpecker and a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Grace and Joe Doyle report 36 species on their weekly birding foray to Camp Peary: Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed

Hawk, Killdeer, Laughing Gull, Common Tern, Mourning Dove, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Palm Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, American Goldfinch, and House Sparrow.

September 16. Bill Williams reports: A Common Nighthawk seen at Settler's Mill.

September 17: Bill Williams reports: In the evening 266 American Robins were counted flying over Merchants Square between 7:10 and 7:30 p.m. heading in the direction of Matthew Whaley School.

September 18: Eleanor Young reports from the Hampton Roads Bird Club Bird Walk at Newport News Park: Great Blue Heron, flock of Mallards with their young, Kingfisher, Pileated Woodpecker, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Downy Woodpecker, Chipping Sparrows, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Bluebirds, American Goldfinches, Mourning Dove, Cooper's Hawk capturing a Mourning Dove, Summer Tanager, Grackles, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Robins, Great Egret, Gadwalls, Mute Swan, Bald Eagles, Osprey – one eating a fish (Bass) on a dead tree.

Tom Armour reports "a Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeding on a Lantana plant on our deck--1st one in 3 days."

Grace and Joe Doyle report 31 species on their weekly birding trip to Camp Peary. Highlights (and birds not seen previous Sunday): Canada Geese, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Ovenbird, Hooded Warbler, Eastern Towhee and House Finch.

September 19: Tom Armour reports that today was the last day he had a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. "On that day I also had 1 Eastern Meadowlark at the airport, first in a long time."

Eleanor Young reports from her own birding expedition to Newport News Park: Carolina Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Mockingbird, Turkey Vulture, Great Blue Heron, House Wren, Great Egret, Kingfisher, Gadwalls, Mute Swan, Osprey, Mallards, Canada Geese.

September 22: Terry Johnston had a Black-throated Blue Warbler at her backyard feeder and hummingbird feeder throughout the day.

September 25: Alex Minarik reports a male Summer Tanager and a White-breasted Nuthatch bathing together in her backyard birdbath. She

also saw a Ruby-throated Hummingbird at the feeder that evening.

Bill Williams reports: "there was an interesting mix of warblers to be had on the Green Springs Trail including 1 Nashville, 2 Northern Parulas, 2 Magnolias, 5 Pines, 1 Bay-breasted, 5 Palm Warblers, 1 Black-and-white, 4 American Redstarts. Other birds included an American Kestrel and 4 House Wrens."

Grace and Joe Doyle report 31 species on their weekly birding trip to Camp Peary. Highlights (and birds not seen previous Sundays): Mallards, Downy Woodpecker, Summer Tanager, Brown-headed Cowbird.

September 26: Tom Armour reports: "today at Treasure Island Road--1 A. Kestrel and 2 Adult Bald Eagles at an old Osprey nest---looks like they may take it over."

Shirley Devan reports 5 immature Bald Eagles circling overhead near the parking lot construction site at Neck-O-Land on the Colonial Parkway. Also, numerous Turkey Vultures and at least one Black Vulture.

September 27: Mike Minarik saw a Red-headed Woodpecker up the block from their house in Windsor Forest.

VIRGINIA PEREGRINE FALCON STATUS UPDATE

By Bryan Watts

Center for Conservation Biology

September 7, 2005: The Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary has compiled annual monitoring results for the Virginia Peregrine Falcon population. The number of known adult pairs increased in 2005 to a modern-day high of 21. This represents a two-pair increase over 2004 and a four-pair increase over the previous 5 years. The first breeding attempt in nearly 10 years was documented in the mountains. This pair nested on Stoney Man in the Shenandoah National Park. Sixteen of 21 pairs made breeding attempts producing 38 chicks that were documented to survive beyond fledging (reproductive rate 1.8 chicks/ occupied territory). Although hatching rate has improved in the past 2 years compared to the previous several, the Virginia population continues to experience problems with hatching rate. Nine of 48 eggs that were monitored did not hatch in 2005 raising ongoing concerns about the influence of environmental contaminants on population recovery. Much of the productivity continues to be the result of active management where chicks are moved from high-risk structures such as bridges and building to be released in the

mountains.

The Peregrine Falcon was believed to be extinct in Virginia as a breeding species by the early 1960's. The original population of peregrine falcons in the eastern United States was estimated to contain approximately 350 breeding pairs. The historic status and distribution of peregrine falcons in Virginia is not completely known because no systematic survey of the species was completed prior to the loss of the population. From published records and accounts, there have been 24 historical peregrine eyries documented in the Appalachians of Virginia.

With other partners the College of William and Mary initiated a Peregrine hacking program for Virginia in 1978. Between 1978 and 2005, more than 300 young falcons have been released in Virginia. The first successful nesting of Peregrine Falcons in Virginia after the DDT era occurred in 1982 on Assateague Island. Since that time, the breeding population has continued a slow but steady increase. However, both hatching rate and chick survival remain somewhat erratic. At present, the long-term viability of the Virginia population in the absence of continued immigration from surrounding populations remains questionable.

We request information on all observations of Peregrine Falcons in Virginia between March and July. Funds for ongoing Peregrine monitoring and management are provided by the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, the National Park Service, and the Center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary.

SEPTEMBER 24 FIELD TRIP

By Tom Armour and Shirley Devan

"Peregrine over the Deodora", "Seven Broad Wings in the Notch," "Merlin over the tall pines," "Kestrel over the red roof," "Got that Coop in a Can?"

This is a sample of what you hear when you hang out on the Hawk Watch Platform on a good day at Kiptopeke State Park. And Saturday, September 24 was a VERY good day for the Williamsburg Bird Club to visit the Hawk Watch stand on the Eastern Shore. The Official Raptor Counter was Sam Stuart of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. Sam displayed and explained the features of two American Kestrels and a male and female Cooper's Hawk to the crowd on the platform. These birds were trapped, banded and then transported to the platform in cans for presentation before release.

Several club members visited the Song Bird Banding Station just behind the Butterfly Garden

and the Hawk Watch platform. The Official Bander was Jethro Runco of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. Visitors enjoyed up-close looks at captured song birds: female Black-and-white Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler and a Gray Catbird.

It was a near record day for the number of Raptors – 670 counted by Sam Stuart. The highlights were the falcons: the Peregrine Falcons, one taking a Tree Swallow in flight; many Merlins speeding by; and 164 Kestrels. The weather was great with good cloud cover to make the observing ideal. Eleven people made this great trip, with Brian Taber as leader: Tom Armour, Jeanne Armour, Barbara Rockwell, Emedio Bracalente, Guests Bob and Karen Richardson, Adrienne Frank, Gary Driscole, Eleanor Young, Shirley Devan and Alex Minarik.

Here are Sam Stuart's official results for the raptor count at the Hawk Watch platform for 11.5 hours on September 24: 1 Black Vulture, 131 Osprey, 6 Bald Eagle, 20 Northern Harrier, 56 Sharp-shinned Hawk, 65 Cooper's Hawk, 25 Broad-winged Hawk, 3 Red-tailed Hawk, 164 American Kestrel (3094 for the season so far!), 155 Merlin, 42 Peregrine Falcon, 2 Unknown, 670 Total Raptors (7406 for the season so far).

Here are Jethro Runco's official results for the song bird count at Kiptopeke Song Bird Banding Station for September 24: 5 American Redstart, 1 Magnolia Warbler, 1 Northern Parula, 2 Black-throated Blue Warbler, 5 Common Yellowthroat, 5 Black-and-white Warbler, 1 Yellow-rumped Warbler, 1 Western Palm Warbler, 3 Northern Waterthrush, 2 Ovenbird, 2 Red-breasted Nuthatch, 1 Red-eyed Vireo, 3 Swainson's Thrush, 4 Gray Catbird, 1 Northern Cardinal, 1 Yellow-billed Cuckoo, 38 total song birds banded for the day.

RESULTS OF THE 11TH KIPTOPEKE CHALLENGE

By Brian Taber

This year Paul Nasca and I welcomed new team member Aimee Weldon, who is the Director of the Virginia Important Bird Areas Program, to the "Wild Birds Unlimited" team of Williamsburg.

This year, for the Kiptopeke Challenge, we decided to try a "Special Venue," an area normally closed to the public, for our area to survey. After securing the special permits from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, we unlocked the gate to Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge before dawn on September 17th. In the dark we heard Black-crowned Night-Herons squawking and flapping just overhead. Soon Northern Cardinals, Carolina Wrens and Black

Vultures were waking up. A few nocturnal migrants began dropping down to the trees and bushes after the night's flight, including American Redstart, Northern Oriole, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Palm Warbler, Blue Grosbeak and Red-eyed Vireo.

As we made our way through the sandy scrub area to the beach, the sun was just coming up and it was clear that it was going to be hot and humid. The beach was full of hundreds of Laughing Gulls and dozens of Black Skimmers, crowded together at the water's edge. As we walked the wide beach on the southeast side of the island, we were hoping for unusual seabirds displaced by Hurricane Ophelia, which churned off North Carolina for the previous several days. We saw piles of sargasso weed from the Gulf Stream, blown in by the storm. Had the storm moved a little closer and been followed by the northwest cold front which almost developed, it would have resulted in the hoped-for perfect conditions for the Kiptopeke Challenge—lots of birds from the south and the north on the same day!

We didn't find any unusual sea birds, as the hurricane stayed offshore, but there were many Caspian, Royal, Sandwich, Common and Forster's terns. We also saw 4 Horned Larks, Sanderlings and a Red Knot. We had to wait for 30 minutes for the tide to go out before we could safely wade across a deep cut from a lagoon to the ocean. After walking for more than 7 hours, we turned around, just as we could see the huge Brown Pelican colony and headed back the same stretch of beach, because the circular island (2000 acres) was wet salt marsh on the other half. There here hundreds of young and adult Brown Pelicans on the beach and flying around.

We tried to walk into the shrubs and understory to look for landbirds, but the thick vegetation and ticks turned us back. We did manage to hear an Eastern Towhee and see Common Yellowthroats. Then we found a bird that is rarely found on the Kiptopeke Challenge, though by November they will become more numerous in the marshes, a Seaside Sparrow, which perched cooperatively for a photo. We saw flocks of White Ibis rising and landing all morning, perhaps close to 100 birds. There were always hawks in sight, mostly Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, American Kestrels and Merlins. A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher gave us great looks from a viney tangle under a group of cherry trees.

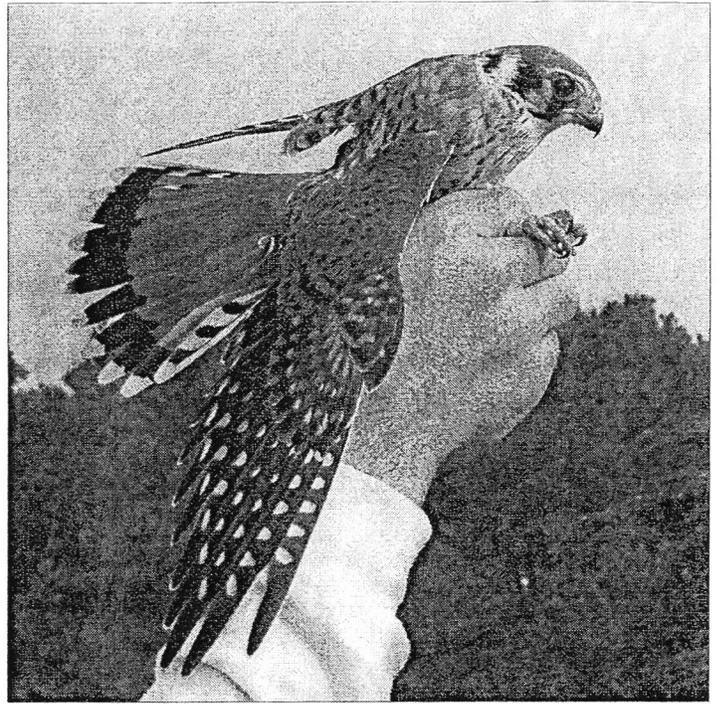
After 10 hours of walking and and no shade we arrived back at the car for lunch (dinner?) and much needed liquid. About 45 minutes later, we began the much shorter walk around the north side of the island and finally found some shorebirds, including Greater Yellowlegs, Semi-palmated

Sandpipers, Willets and American Oystercatchers. Surprisingly, there were no swallows all day. Tired, but satisfied that we had scoured Virginia's southernmost barrier island, we listened to a pair of Great Horned Owls calling after dark, as we got into the car for the, thankfully, only 3 mile trip to Kiptopeke to spend the night.

According to Kurt Gaskill, Kiptopeke Challenge 2005 Coordinator, these are the preliminary counts and results from all 11 teams:

1. Northern Virginia Bird Club Wandering Siskins - 140 species
2. Laughing Falcons - 121
3. Augusta County Bird Club Bald Eagles - 119
4. Leupold/VSO Roving Ravens - 115
5. Jerry's Fledglings - 110 (VSO Chincoteague Field Trip for Saturday)
6. Tequila Mockingbirds - 109
7. Virginia Beach Audubon Dirty Dickcissels - 100
8. Platform Poachers - 85 (CVWO Team)
9. Team Juvies - 80 (Youth Team entry)
10. Wild Birds Unlimited of Williamsburg - 71 (Special Venue - Fisherman Island NWR).
Team members were WBC member Brian Taber, Aimee Weldon and Paul Nasca.
11. Wayward Loons - 67 (Special Venue - Eastern Shore of VA NWR)

This year's teams added a few new species to the KC cumulative list: Least Tern, Prothonotary Warbler, and Lark Sparrow. Some interesting and unusual species sightings were King Rail, American Golden Plover, Baird's Sandpiper, Gull-billed Tern, Barred Owl and Worm-eating Warbler.



Kestrel captured for banding at Kiptopeke State Park