



Monticello Bird Club

November 2005

Volume 20, Number 3

November Meeting Topic:

Colonial Nesting Birds of Virginia

Virginia's colonial nesting birds have had a long and often tumultuous history. On November 10, Bill Williams, the Education Director at William & Mary's Center for Conservation Biology, will discuss aspects of the birds' natural history, changes in the bird populations over time, and the probable causes and potential solutions for the changes.



MBC's November Speaker Bill Williams

There is already a tremendous amount of data about these birds. Comprehensive beach-nesting and colonial waterbird surveys of the Virginia barrier islands have been conducted annually since 1975. These surveys have documented the population trends of 27 bird species, some of which have only recently colonized the state.

Bill Williams was a founder of the Williamsburg Bird Club and the Coastal Vir-

ginia Wildlife Observatory. Author of numerous publications in the field of ornithology, Bill is a past president of the Virginia Society of Ornithology and has been the Director of the Virginia Barrier Islands Colonial Waterbirds Survey for The Nature Conservancy since 1975.

He was founder and Director of the Kiptopeke Hawk Watch from 1977-2002.

Please join our speaker for dinner at 5:30 pm at Wild Greens Restaurant in Barracks Road North prior to the meeting.

Not-To-Miss MBC Meetings

December 8: Jeff Trollinger

Mr. Trollinger is a wildlife biologist who helped coordinate the recently-completed Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. He'll provide an update of that project.

January 12: Randy Thrasher

Get ready for a South American journey with Mr. Thrasher's presentation of "Birding Peru - A World Class Adventure."

February 9: Ron Louque

Mr. Louque is an accomplished wildlife artist who designed the 2003-2004 Federal Duck Stamp. It featured a pair of Snow Geese flying over the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

Comments From the President

The bird feeding season is upon us once again. I know that many people feed the wild birds all year round, but not my husband and I. The only birds to benefit from our largess in the summer are the hummers. But I'm looking forward to winter feeding. We often marvel that we can watch the same old birds doing the same old things at the feeders day after day and yet we find ourselves endlessly captivated. I know the birds are looking forward to the feeding season too.

Last October when it was time to set up the elaborate fixtures that my husband has developed over the years, we came out onto the deck with the step ladder. No feeders in hand, certainly no feed – just the step ladder. Immediately titmice gathered in the River Birches that shade

the deck and started dancing around the branches, calling and chattering. Soon arrived the chickadees and the nuthatches. Such a commotion as they monitored our every move. As soon as a tube feeder was in place we went to get some seed. Before we were off the deck a titmouse was on top of the empty feeder, leaning over and peering inside. Such impertinence! Such fun.

—Jennifer Gaden, president

Inside November 2005

Mississippi Kites-Part 2	2
Birdseed Sale Alert	2
MBC Field Trips	3
'05 Bluebird Report	4
Gardening for Wildlife	4

MBC BIRDSEED SALE
Order Deadline: October 28
Pick-Up: Saturday, November 12
8:30-11:30 am
Virginia Department of Forestry
WAREHOUSE
Follow Signs for Pick-Up

Brenda Tekin's Excellent Adventure...with Kites

(Part Two)

On July 26th, Brenda Tekin photographed a juvenile Mississippi Kite on a nest with an adult bird near the small town of Branchville. In doing so, she confirmed the.... but I'll let her finish the story.

At long last, the first nesting record for Mississippi Kite in Southside Virginia was documented! There was one juvenile, and by now it had most of its feathers except the head that was still white fuzz. The nest consisted of small, thin branches, well concealed in the very upper portion of a tall Sweet Gum tree.

It would not be until July 23 before the juvenile ventured out of the nest for the first time by jumping down to a lower branch where it preened and stretched the wings while the parents continued to deposit food. Forty minutes after venturing out, the juvenile flapped, hopped and scrambled its way back up to the nest where it began to feed on the insects left earlier by the parents. It would be within a matter of days when the young bird would take to the air for the first time. A week later when I returned on July 30,

the juvenile was now fully fledged and no longer returning to the nest. Instead,



Find the immature Mississippi Kite...

it flew short distances, landing in upper canopy of nearby trees. It was now more vocal, responding to the nearby parents who continued to bring food every 5-10 minutes.

My last visit was on August 2. The juvenile was flying with confidence for

extended periods and the parents were spending more time in aerial acrobatic soaring at higher altitudes.

—Brenda Tekin

Member Notes

NEW MEMBERS: Please welcome our newest members. They are: Brad Suter & Nancy Burr, Keswick Barbara Wallace, Barboursville Rachel Harrison, Charlottesville

BIRDSEED PICK-UP ALERT: Birdseed Pick-Up on November 12 is at the Virginia Department of Forestry Warehouse in the Fontaine Business Park. There is a UVA football game that day and traffic may get heavy. We urge you to pick up your birdseed early. Pick-Up will be from 8:30-11:30 am.

FIRST SATURDAY BIRD WALK: Join Dave Hogg at Ivy Creek Natural Area on Saturday December 3. Meet in the parking lot at 7:30am. We have extra binoculars for novice birders. Questions? Contact Dave at 974-7592.

Bird Club Key Info

The Monticello Bird Club normally meets at 7:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month, September through June, at the Education Building of the Ivy Creek Natural Area on Earlysville Road, 1/2 mile north of Hydraulic Road.

The editor of the MBC Newsletter welcomes submissions including articles, photographs and notices. **DEADLINE for the December issue is November 21.** Please email information to Nancy King at turnermtn@mindspring.com or send to P.O. Box 22, Ivy, VA 22945.

Monticello Bird Club
P.O. Box 4362
Charlottesville, Virginia 22905
Please visit our website at
www.ecoventures-travel.com/mbc

Monticello Bird Club Board Members

President	Jennifer Gaden	jg3p@cstone.net	293-6275
Vice President	Jim Hill	jimcarhill@adelphia.net	975-6523
Secretary	Peggy Cornett	pcornett@monticello.org	984-9816
Treasurer	Bob Gilges	rgilges@msn.com	823-7638
Field Trips	Lois Gebhardt John Zimmerman	cvillebirder@earthlink.net jozimmva@aol.com	972-2446 974-9293
Programs	Ron Kingston	kingston@cstone.net	293-5173
Publicity	Ellen Dudley	emdudley@nexet.net	244-2688
Hospitality	Priscilla Kingston	kingston@cstone.net	293-5173
Newsletter	Nancy King	turnermtn@mindspring.com	293-7201
Membership	Robyn Kells	rkells@ntelos.net	970-1044
Birdseed Sale	Howard Davis	howardsuedavis@juno.com	964-1242

Upcoming Field Trips for Colder Weather Birds

Eastern Shore & Chincoteague NWR November 18-20

Leader: John Zimmerman. For those who have submitted the form for security clearance, we will meet at the south end of the CBBT in the administration parking lot at 9:45am on Friday, November 18. For those who have chosen not to do the CBBT, we will meet you at the Visitors Center, Eastern Shore NWR at 1 pm. Overnight reservations for Chincoteague can be made at the Island Motor Inn (Tel: 757-336-3141). Mention you are with the Monticello Bird Club for the group rate of \$92/ night. 7 day prior cancellation limit.

MBC Minutes for October 13, 2005

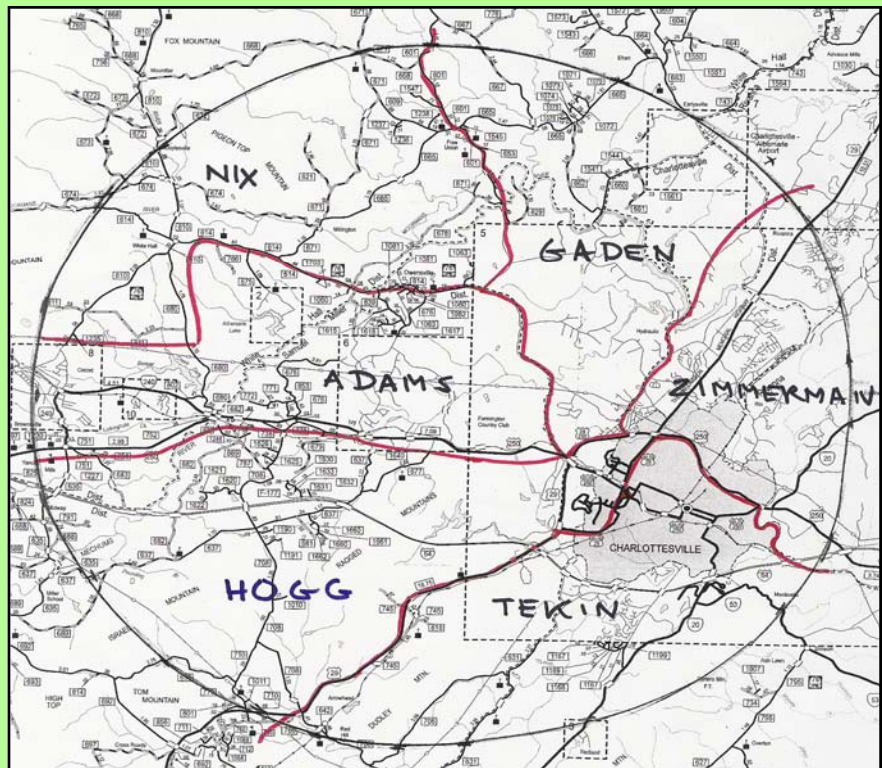
President Jenny Gaden presided; a record 78 people attended.

Field trips: John Zimmerman reported on the Sparrow Road/Beaver Creek trip and the trip to Sheier Natural Area. Teresa Shaner will lead the First Saturday Bird Walk at ICNA November 5. Also on November 5, VSO is scheduled to meet at ICNA and Mark Adams will lead a trip to Theodore Roosevelt's retreat, Pine Knot, continuing our bird census. The Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel trip has been organized and there are 13 registered for the escorted tour of Islands 2, 3, and 4. Jim Nix reviewed the recent trip along the James River at Scottsville, where they recorded about 35 species, including a Bald Eagle, a Peregrine Falcon, Blue Grosebeak, Black-throated Green and Myrtle Warblers.

Treasurer's Report: Bob Gilges reported that dues are trickling in. He

CBC Warm-Up on Saturday, December 10

Coordinator: John Zimmerman. This is not the *official* Charlottesville Christmas Bird Count, but we will be covering the same area. Consult the map (below) showing the sectors in the count circle, each identified by the sector leader. Choose one of these sectors, and then contact the sector leader to learn the time and place that group will meet. **Call:** Jenny Gaden/293-6275; Jim Nix/973-7366; John Zimmerman /974-9293; Mark Adams/245-2250; Brenda Tekin/977-4209; Davis Hogg/974-7592. Compilation with all the sector groups will be at the Ivy Creek Natural Area's Education Building at 4 pm.



recorded \$1,300 income; \$1,500 expenses YTD. The main expenditures in September was a \$500 donation to the Ivy Creek Foundation and \$800 for pre-stamped envelopes to mail the newsletter.

Bird Seed Sale: Howard Davis updated the Birdseed Sale at the VA Dept. of Forestry Warehouse on November 12. Come early to avoid UVA football traffic.

Miscellaneous: Jenny Gaden shared a recent brochure she received from a birding resort in Mexico. She encouraged MBC members to join the VSO to receive the Quarterly Journal, *The Raven*.

Bird Sightings: Bob Gilges saw a Swainson's Thrush on his property. Jenny Gaden saw a Gray-cheeked Thrush at her home. Jenny was also curious about late season hummingbird sightings. She has seen male hummers as late as October 12 in 2003, but not this year. Her last females were seen October 5. Lou Tanner noted that he has always had hummingbirds in Belmont to mid-October and Vickie Boyle reported that she has seen a male Hummingbird as late as mid November. Jim Nix reported a Swamp Sparrow at his house and late-season Nighthawks on 29-North.

—Peggy Cornett, secretary

Gardening for Wildlife: Birds Love Spicebush Berries

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) is appropriately named because its bruised leaves and stems have a spicy-sweet odor. It is also a splendid harbinger of spring; its branches studded with small, greenish-yellow flowers in early April. It will grow into a large, dense (6-12 feet high and wide) rounded shrub in full sun but it is somewhat open in appearance in the shade. The species is dioecious, and the female spicebush has bright, red fruit that ripen in September and October. The fruits remind me of the fruits of the Cornelian Cherry (*Cornus mas*). It has been reported that up to 30 species of birds enjoy spicebush berries. The regular harvesters of our bushes are mockingbirds and cardinals. We have had nesting catbirds and Brown Thrashers in this location so perhaps they enjoyed the fruit, also. In the fall, Spicebush contributes its brilliant yellow color to the wider autumn spectacle. Spicebush does best in acid, moist soils in full sun to partial shade. It is a wonderful wildlife habitat plant and



Spicebush fall berries. Photo: William Justice.

should be more widely used in the landscape. Unfortunately, spicebush is diffi-

cult to transplant because of a coarsely, fibrous root system. Another member of the Laurel family, Common Sassafras (*discussed last month*) is also extremely difficult to transplant from the wild because of its deep, tap root and few spreading, lateral roots.

Bob Eubank, a member of the Lynchburg Bird Club and a noted expert in gardening with native plants has a simple

method of starting both spicebush and sassafras from seed. He collects the berries as they ripen and removes the fleshy seed coat by hand. Then, he rinses the seeds under running water in a sieve. The fruit can stain the hands so latex gloves are a good idea. Dry the seeds on paper towels; plant two or three seeds in a 4-inch pot for germination; put the pots in flats and place screens over them to prevent rodents from eating the seeds; over-winter the planted seeds outdoors, preferably, in an area with moist shade and filtered light. After germination, move the plants to increasingly larger containers as a good root system develops. Plants in 1-1.5 gallon pots usually have established root systems and can be planted out. You can also tell the male from the female at this time. Plant the females in full sun for the best berry production.

Both sassafras and spicebush are great natives that attract birds and butterflies. They are excellent in naturalized plantings, roadsides and home landscaping.

—Bill Leaning

Hammond's '05 Nest Box Report

Another nesting season for birds has passed and it is time to share with you the results of the season. This year we had 354 nest boxes out in the City of Charlottesville, the County of Albemarle and on the Swannanoa Golf Course in Nelson County. Out of these nest boxes, a total of 1309 birds fledged, including: 763 bluebirds, 473 tree swallows, 41 chickadees, 7 titmice and 25 house wrens.

It is difficult to understand why the bluebird numbers that averaged about 1300 a year for several years dropped to 732 in 2003, recovered some to 896 in 2004 and dropped to 763 in 2005. We realize from experience that when numbers drop sharply they recover more slowly. We will monitor them closely to see how long the recovery requires. The tree swallows are thriving, recovering from a slight drop in 2004 to gain

over 100 fledglings in 2005. In some locations we have added additional nest boxes to make pairs 25 to 30 feet apart. In spite of that effort the numbers of tree swallows have increased about 20% while bluebird numbers have fallen. Chickadee numbers dropped in 2002, leveled off in 2003 and dropped sharply in 2004, and then leveled off in 2005

The house wren numbers remained very low for two years, but now seem to be recovering. I was beginning to be concerned about their survival. I am annoyed when they build nests in 3 or 4 boxes and use only one, but I do enjoy watching and listening to them. We may be a part of their problem since we are locating nest boxes in open areas that especially favor bluebirds. It may be to save the house wrens we need to erect some boxes near tree and low shrubbery especially for them.



Baby Blue seconds before fledging. Photo: Dean Rossa @ mynewroads.com

I am already thinking about 2006 and wondering what it will bring. Let's hope that it a great weather season and no disease problems. We appreciate all of those folks that show their interest in the bluebird nest boxes and here is a great big "Thank You" to everyone who helped monitor the nest boxes.

—Bob Hammond