

[From Summer 1999]

A Celebration for the Birds

The spring bird migration was closely watched this year at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge (ESVNWR). We even celebrated the season with an entire day dedicated to migratory birds on May 8, 1999. This day, formally named the International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), was a big event for ESVNWR.

Its tremendous success was accomplished with a lot of help from Kiptopeke Environmental Station and Research Education Laboratory (KESTREL), Kiptopeke State Park, the Virginia Living Museum, David Naar, the Legacy Program students and teachers from Northampton High School, and the many guests who showed up to celebrate migratory birds.

Birds, of course, were the focus of this event. ESVNWR offered many activities for adults and children which highlighted migratory birds. We conducted three tours of Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge, which was a special treat because access to this island is restricted during the breeding season to protect the privacy of nesting bird colonies. Their privacy was maintained as our tours carefully avoided the nesting areas of the egrets and herons, as well as the brown pelican and royal tern breeding colonies. However, this did not keep us from seeing some really neat birds since the spring migration had picked up in the week previous to IMBD. Highlights from the tours included black and white warblers, yellow-billed cuckoo, and American oystercatchers. Brian Taber, vice president of KESTREL, was on hand to assist ESVNWR staff with this tour.

Some folks took to the water to see birds from a different view. They enjoyed the two canoe trips organized by Kiptopeke State Park for IMBD. Despite a turnover or two, the canoe trips provided our guests with an exciting birding excursion. Thankfully, it was a mild, sunny day.

A number of guests took the opportunity to get up close and personal with some of our favorite spring migrants at our songbird banding station. This is the first season we have had songbird banding on the refuge. The banding was done by Jamie Cameron, who was working for ESVNWR and KESTREL throughout the spring. His project also included migration surveys and point counts.

During IMBD, the banding station was in full swing at the Winslow bunker located on the nature trail. Two ruby-throated hummingbirds were caught in the mist nets, as was an indigo bunting along with the typical Carolina wrens and common yellowthroats. Mr. Cameron's work and the effort of other KESTREL volunteers who helped band is much appreciated.

Mr. Cameron was a busy man on May 8th; he also presented an entertaining and educational slide show on migratory birds common to the Eastern Shore. This provided our guests with a preview of the bird life they could see throughout the day, as well as a brief explanation of the avian biology work being conducted at the refuge this spring.

Another crowd pleaser was the Virginia Living Museum raptor presentation. How can you go wrong when you have live birds putting on a show? The presenter, Mark Bostrom, was accompanied by a kestrel, a great homed owl, an Eastern screech owl, and a red-tailed hawk. His brilliant interpretive program punctuated the thrill of seeing these amazing birds so close.

Some people showed up for IMBD just to learn how to use a digital camera. Mr. David Naar detailed the many uses and functions of digital cameras. This new technology is sure to be appreciated by bird photographers everywhere who have used up rolls of film to capture one acceptable shot.

We also had the pleasure of hosting several local artists who gave a creative twist to the celebration. They featured everything from carvings to metal sculpture to paintings. Many children who showed up for IMBD also got creative making buttons, decorating a wildlife mural, and building birdhouses and feeders.

Beautiful weather, plenty of helpful people, interesting programs, and, of course, the birds, all came together on May 8th to make IMBD a wonderful day. The bird count for the weekend came to a grand total of 126 species. These species included peregrine falcon, blacknecked stilt, and our lone American white pelican -along with others previously mentioned. ESVNWR would like to thank all those people who took part in IMBD this year and we look forward to seeing you again next year for a bigger and better celebration!

Camille Darby, Refuge Intern