

**Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the
Williamsburg Bird Club**
Wednesday, April 16, 2014
Andrews Hall, Room 101, W&M, 7:30 pm

Attendance: 28

President's Remarks:

- President Geoff Giles opened the meeting and welcomed the assembly.
- Geoff welcomed the one visitor present who introduced himself as a new Master Naturalist who was eager to learn more about birds.
- Geoff proceeded to ask Shirley Devan, current president of local Master Naturalist program, to comment on it. Shirley reported that the Master Naturalists shared several programs with members of the Williamsburg Bird Club including the Spring Bird Count, Christmas Bird Count and the Bluebird Program. The next training session that will run from September 2014 to March 2015 begins in late August and our next newsletter will have information regarding how to apply if interested.
- Geoff enquired about any interesting bird observations. The new arrivals being seen included Catbirds, Hummingbirds, House Wrens, Red-eyed Vireo, Purple Martins and Northern rough-winged Swallows.

Announcements:

- Geoff noted that when our club was founded in 1977, a Bluebird Committee and a Purple Martin Committee were formed shortly thereafter. The Purple Martin Committee has been monitoring 2 bird houses, one of which (the one at Melissa's Meadow on S Henry St near the W&M Tennis Center) has worn out. Geoff has kindly provided a new replacement and Joanne Andrews has volunteered to assemble the bird house.
Bob Long has been a moving force of this committee for many years and is retiring. A replacement is needed and Geoff asked that anyone interested please contact him.
- Geoff reported that Bob's wife, Cynthia Long who was our past club historian, showed him the albums that have been assembled documenting our club's history. He was impressed how it showed how Ruth Beck and Bill Williams really got it started. Volume 1 is available for perusal by those interested at the end of the meeting.
- Geoff announced that Ruth Beck has once again volunteered to host the annual club picnic at her house to be held on Sunday, June 1st. Jan Lockwood is organizing the refreshments. A sign-up sheet will be available at our next meeting.
- Geoff reported that the Williamsburg annual Spring Bird Count will be held Sunday, May 4th. He encouraged members to join a team and to contact Bill Williams or Jim Corliss to do so.
- Geoff asked Jan Lockwood to report on the Bluebird Committee. Jan reported that the first Bluebird egg in the boxes they monitor was laid April 1st and that as of now, there are a total of 100 eggs. She also announced that the two new trails referred to at our last meeting have been

established. She asked if anyone had any recommendations of how to discourage house sparrows from taking over Bluebird boxes.

Upcoming Events:

- Jim Corliss, Field Trip Coordinator, announced 2 upcoming field trips.
 - Saturday, April 19, Bob Ake will lead a trip expected to last 4-5 hours to the Dismal Swamp to walk the Washington Ditch and note the birds and butterflies. Members can meet at Old Colony Square on Jamestown Road at 5:30am to carpool. Geoff reported having recently seen Prairie, Hooded, Black-and- white, and Parula Warblers there.
 - Saturday, May 10, a trip to Shirley Plantation is in the planning stages.

Program:

Shirley Devan introduced the three W&M students who've received this year's Bill Sheehan and Ruth Beck Ornithological Research Grants from our club. She emphasized that investing in the future of science and young scientists was one of our club's most worthwhile endeavors. The students gave the following power point presentations about their research.

- Ghazi Mahjoub's research was *Excluding European Starlings by Disrupting their Acoustic Environment*. Large flocks cause significant damage to grain and high value crops and are second only to seagulls in causing damage to airplanes. Previous deterrents have been dangerous (chemicals) or failed as starlings quickly habituate to startle regimes. Ghazi had been working on broadcasting a sonic net using the same frequency as that of starling vocalizations to prevent starlings from communicating. Results to date on captive Starlings are promising and he will be working on field tests this summer at the airport at Fort Eustis.
- Margaret Whitney's research was on *The Impact of Methylmercury on Passerine Migratory Behavior*. She reported that 85% of adult bird mortality occurs during migration so anything that affects their readiness is important. Methylmercury, a global pollutant, has been proven to impact endocrine function, immunocompetence, neurological function and reproductive success. Margaret studied captive White-throated Sparrows to monitor possible effects of methylmercury on the birds' fattening prior to migration and directional orientation. The results were inconclusive regarding orientation. Sparrows contaminated with methylmercury fattened up earlier than the control group. Ramifications of that are not fully understood yet.
- Vitek Jirinec's research was on wild Wood Thrush males around W&M and nearby areas and whether the areas frequented by these thrushes was due to habitat composition or availability of more food. He reported that there has been a general 50% decline in population of this species and that answering this question has important conservation implications as well as perhaps understanding why a forest associated bird persists in human fragmented areas around Williamsburg. Male thrushes are most easily caught in mist nests as they are very territorial and respond to vocal lures. They are then fitted with radio transmitters. He is in the midst of this study and will be studying female thrushes next. Preliminary results indicate that quality and availability of food is a primary driving force.

At the end of the meeting a free raffle was held.

Geoff adjourned the meeting at 9:20 pm.

Refreshments were provided by Mary McIntosh and Joanne Sheffield at the back of the room.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Millar, Secretary, Williamsburg Bird Club,
April 17, 2014