

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the  
**Williamsburg Bird Club**  
*Wednesday, September 17, 2014*  
Andrews Hall, Room 101, 7:30 pm

**Attendance:** 38

**President's Remarks:**

- President Geoff Giles opened the meeting and welcomed the assembly including 2 guests who were in the Master Naturalists Program.
- Geoff enquired about interesting bird sightings. The most exciting one was the Sabine's Gull which many members had seen around the Jamestown Ferry. Blue-winged Warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, Cap May Warblers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were also reported. Ruby-throated hummingbirds still noted in good numbers in the area. Geoff encouraged folks to consider keeping hummingbird feeders going through the winter to see if will attract Rufous Hummingbirds that have been wintering here lately in small numbers.
- Geoff announced that a William and Mary Bird Club has been formed by the students. He asked Dan Cristol for comments. Dan said that 75 students signed up and that 37 students have showed up three times per week over last 3 weeks to bird on campus. They are also picking up dead birds killed by window collision and are having them stuffed for the college's collection. Geoff reported that the WBC Board had decided to make the W&M Bird Club dues- free associate members and that they are most welcome to participate in all our club activities.
- Geoff reported that there are 2 WBC Board Member vacancies and those interested should contact him:
  1. Newsletter editor of the The Flyer. Geoff commented that Fred Blystone, one of the club's founding members has been doing a fantastic job for more years than anyone can remember. He has been recently ably assisted by Shirley Devan. Both are ready to hand over the reins.
  2. Publicity Chairperson is a new post that has been added to facilitate getting announcements out to the local papers with regularity to get people in the community interested in joining us.

**Announcements:**

- Shirley Devan announced that this Saturday, Sept. 20, she and Susan Powell, Jan Lockwood and Cheryl Jacobson were the team, 'Wren Wrustlers,' who would compete in the Kiptopeke Challenge and would appreciate donations which would go to fund the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. Their team is one of two from our bird club who will compete to identify the greatest number of bird species in a single day.
- Jan Lockwood and Lois Ullman gave a summary of this year's monitoring of Bluebird boxes which is the largest Master Naturalist project involving 62 monitors. There are now 12 trails and 31 more boxes were installed this year. First egg was laid April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Last bird to fledged was

September 8<sup>th</sup>. 82% fledged from the eggs that were laid. So the bluebird population is definitely stable.

- Jan Lockwood passes around a sign-up sheet for future meeting refreshments.
- Sheryl Jacobson reported that this year's survey of Osprey nests indicated that a great number of their nests along the James River failed and that they were much more successful in the Chesapeake Bay area.

#### **Upcoming Events:**

- Jim Corliss, Field Trip Coordinator, was absent. Geoff announced the upcoming trip this Saturday, September 20<sup>th</sup> at Newport News Park. Those interested in carpooling should meet at Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Rd at 7:30 am or meet at the parking lot at the park ranger's station.
- Cheryl Jacobson, Program Coordinator, described the topics of upcoming program speakers.
  - October 15 and November 19: A video will be shown in 2 parts on "Juncos" that was professionally made by W&M grad students. Dan Cristol will be present to comment on it.
  - January 21: Fletcher Smith of Center for Conservation Biology will present a program on Saltmarsh Sparrows and then lead a follow up trip to the Eastern Shore to net Saltmarsh Sparrows.
  - February 18, 2015: Joint meeting with Historic Rivers Chapter of VA Master Naturalists that will feature presentation by Pearl Beamer on Wildlife Rehabilitation.

#### **Program:**

Cheryl Jacobson introduced tonight's speaker, Dr. Dan Cristol, biology professor at W&M and member of Williamsburg Bird Club. He specializes in Animal Behavior, Behavioral Ecology, Ornithology and Ecotoxicology.

Dan started the presentation with an entertaining account of his one month family vacation in Australia with pictures of the great birds and animals he saw before beginning what he said was the much drier account of his research of the effect of mercury on birds.

Dan presented a riveting account of his and his W&M students' ongoing research of 6 years in the Shenandoah Valley that is now being continued in the W&M aviary in dosing studies on Zebra Finches. The mercury being emitted by the coal being burned at a rayon and polyester plant in Waynesboro not only pollutes the water life of the river but when the river overflows, the mercury enters the soil and is sucked up by plants and trees so that insects feeding on them are also contaminated. Obvious avian victims are ones who feed on the water insects and fish like Tree Swallows and Kingfishers. But they found that forest birds like Red-eyed Vireos and Carolina Wrens that were 400 yards away from the river showed equal amount of mercury toxicity much of it due to the mercury laden spiders being fed to the chicks. Their research has resulted in the first case of the government being able to know exactly what damage to bird life has been done by a company's emission of mercury. Federal law dictates that the offending company pay accordingly to purchase land and plant trees to create a bird environment to compensate for the number of birds not born due to mercury toxicity.

Their research showed that some of the effects of mercury poisoning included altered song complexity and pitch, corticosterone response to stress depressed, immune response delayed or suppressed, altered molting times and lower survival of fledged chicks. Dan stressed a couple of times that our club's grants to W&M undergraduate and graduate students who are conducting this research are a great help.

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

Geoff adjourned the meeting at 9 pm.

Refreshments were provided by Lois Ullman and Jan Lockwood

Respectfully Submitted,  
Cathy Millar, Secretary, Williamsburg Bird Club  
September 18, 2014