

**Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the
Williamsburg Bird Club**
Wednesday, April 15, 2015
Andrews Hall, Room 101, W&M, 7:30 pm

Attendance: 29

President's Remarks:

- President Geoff Giles opened the meeting and greeted the assembly.
- Geoff welcomed 3 new members; no visitors
- Geoff enquired about observations of recent migratory arrivals. Many members had seen hummingbirds in the last week. One Baltimore Oriole, Palm Warblers, Black & White Warblers, Ovenbirds, Chimney Swifts and Purple Martins among others were reported being recently seen in the area.

Announcements:

- Rock Moeslein reported that the Virginia Living Museum's Birding Cup last weekend had been won by W&M biology students who reported 118 species. A total count of all reported species from all teams was 140 during this event.
- Geoff reported that those that wished to get a good look at a nesting female Great Horned Owl and her 2 owlets should go to Sandy Bottom Nature Park in Hampton and he described where the nest was.
- Geoff reported that due to especially generous membership donations this year, the Board had voted to use some of the extra funds to support 2 worthy projects.
 1. Funding was made available to provide bluebird houses in support of the birding program run by 5th grade teacher, Roger Searles, at Waller Mill Elementary School. Jan Lockwood and Lee Schuster have purchased and put up 6 boxes at the school.
 2. Typically our club gives 3 grants to help fund research in ornithology by W&M biology students. This year we have been able to offer a 4th scholarship. Nick Newberry was asked to come to the front where Dan Cristol extolled Nick's virtues as a birder and student who has single handedly reinvigorated the student bird club on campus which has expanded to about 100 members. Nick has proposed a study to test in this area a recent one done in Texas that suggested that the addition of just a single bird species increases real estate value by about \$30,000. The results are apt to be different due to the different variety of birds here but the findings could have an impact on how homes are marketed and managed. Geoff gave Nick a check for \$599. Nick thanked the assembly for the club's support.
- Geoff announced that our club has been honored by the Alpha Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa at W&M for this year's Life Long Learner Award. He read from the letter that announced the award and reported that the club was chosen after careful review of the club's 40 year history as a community organization which exemplifies Phi Beta Kappa's commitment to lifetime pursuit of

knowledge. Geoff has been invited to an event held on May 15 to accept this award on behalf of all the members.

- Geoff reminded the assembly that May 3rd was Spring Bird Count and that Bill Williams was taking names of people who wanted to be on a team.
- Geoff stated that in early June the annual summer WBC picnic will be held once again at Ruth Beck's home. A committee will be formed to organize it.

Reports:

- Jan Lockwood reported on the status of bluebird trails and boxes. She was sad to say that there is much less activity on the bluebird trails this spring. In 235 boxes there are only 3 nests with eggs. Thirty four adult birds were found dead in boxes where they had sought shelter from the unusually cold winter. It is thought that the reason may be due to the late winter cold spell when food resources were fairly well depleted. In contrast, a sizeable number of members who have bluebird boxes on their property have very active nests with eggs. It is thought that this is due to the homeowners feeding the birds through the tough winter. Jan reported that the Bluebird Trail at Waller Mill Pond is now up.
- Cheryl Jacobson reported on Osprey Watch. Their number of nest monitors has risen to 24 this year. The ospreys returned on schedule but 70% of established nests had been blown away this winter. Cheryl said the birds appeared bewildered for a couple of days but then set about toward rebuilding and that egg laying and incubation are on schedule. Chicks are expected to hatch in about 3-4 weeks.

Upcoming Events:

Field Trips:

Jim Corliss, the club's chairperson for field trips, was welcomed back after having been absent from the club for several months due to illness in his family. Jan Lockwood was thanked by Geoff for doing a stunning job of substituting for Jim.

Jan gave a brief report of upcoming trips.

- **Saturday, April 18:** Great Dismal Swamp birding trip from 7-11 am beginning at the Washington Ditch lead by Bob Ake. Expect to walk about 5-6 miles. Carpool at Colony Square Shopping Center with departure at 5:45 am.
- **Saturday, June 6:** Mike Wilson, Center for Conservation Biology, will lead a trip to Piney Grove Preserve in Sussex which hosts the only area in VA where the Red-cockaded Woodpecker nests. There are currently 14 breeding pairs. Carpool at Colony Square Shopping Center with departure at 4 am as the birds are best seen when they wake up and are leaving their nest cavities.
- **May:** Geoff stated that there is an opening in May for a field trip and asked the assembly whether they were interested in going to Beaverdam Park in Gloucester on the 3rd Saturday or on an overnight trip to Delaware to see the spectacle of migrating Red Knots feasting on horseshoe crab eggs on May 24th. The majority indicated an interest in the Red Knot trip. Geoff stated he would start looking into it.

Programs:

Cheryl Jacobson reported on the remaining program for this season of WBC meetings.

- **May 20:** This is the rescheduled joint meeting with the Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists featuring the speaker Pearl Beamer who is a bird and animal rehabilitator. She is likely to bring a hawk and an owl.

Program: Cheryl Jacobson asked Dr. Dan Cristol to introduce the 3 students who won last year's WBC research grants. Each gave the following 15 minute presentation on their research and expressed gratitude for the club's support.

1. Akshay Deverakonda, an undergraduate student, reported on his study using telemetry to map the space that breeding pairs of Wood Thrushes cover and how male and female territories overlap. Such information could help determine what land should be conserved.
2. Stephanie Chin, 2nd year Master's student, did a study to see if mercury reduces avian reproductive success through direct embryo toxicity or altered parental behavior using zebra finches as the model species. To date her research has indicated that there is no overall significant difference in parental behavior.
3. Autumn Swan, 2nd year Master's student, studied the effect of loud noise on the social structure of the very vocal European Starlings.

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

Geoff adjourned the meeting at 9:17 pm.

Refreshments were provided by Roger Gosden and Jan Lockwood.

Respectfully Submitted,
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club
April 16, 2015