

## **Williamsburg Bird Club**

*Wednesday, January 20, 2016*

Integrated Science Center, Room 1127, W&M, 7:00 pm

**Attendance:** 38

### **President's Remarks:**

- President Geoff Giles opened the meeting and greeted the gathering congratulating everyone on finding our new meeting place in the Integrated Science Center building. He invited Dr. Dan Cristol to introduce us to this center.  
Dan described how when he arrived at W&M 20 years ago, the science departments were scattered in various buildings. Five years ago, the Chemistry, Biology and Psychology Departments were brought together under one roof in this new building. The Ornithology Dept. was unable to move in as there were funding problems and the facility was not big enough so they stayed in Millington Hall. A third wing is currently being built on to the ISC into which the Ornithology Dept. will move in May, whereupon Millington Hall will then be torn down. Labs will be in a joint complex which will foster more bird research. W&M got a ½ million dollar grant for equipment for the ISC some of which will come to the Ornithology Dept. for more sophisticated equipment for studying mercury levels in birds. To get that grant, they have to raise 1 million dollars. He urged that interested folks give now and not wait to leave a donation in their wills. He noted that rest rooms are conveniently right outside our meeting room. Dan said he will continue to try to reserve this room so that we have a permanent meeting place.
- Geoff welcomed one visitor. There were no new members.
- Geoff enquired about recent interesting bird sightings. Shirley Devan had for the first time 10 Pine Siskins at her feeder. Members were reporting huge gatherings of Common Grackles. Andy Hawkins reported seeing a Baltimore Oriole in his yard and in Portsmouth a female Painted Bunting. Wilson Snipes are being spotted in Cumberland Marsh near West Point. Nick Newberry saw a Pine Warbler and a Barred Owl and nest in a sycamore tree in Colonial Williamsburg. Christina Clarke gave harrowing details how she freed by herself a Red-tailed Hawk who was entangled in mesh covering a tree.

**Program:** Dan Cristol introduced tonight's speakers who are 2 William and Mary students who did research on birds this past summer: Nick Newberry and Matt Anthony.

Matt is a PhD student in the American Studies program studying the cultural phenomenon of birding. Nick is an undergraduate biology student, founder and president of the W&M Bird Club, and doing research which the club has funded about the diversity and abundance of birds around homes in Williamsburg and the sale price of those homes in the last 5 years and whether there is a relationship between those 2 things. A study in Texas found that a house with 1 more species of birds was worth \$30,000 more when sold.

Matt Anthony gave the first presentation about his summer internship with the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, MD working with the Breeding Bird Survey. His main focus was explaining to us what the BBS is, what it does and what it is useful for. It was begun in 1966 and is one of the oldest 'citizen science' programs. It is a collaborative program between professional ornithologists, statisticians and other scientists who enlist the services of unpaid amateur birders to collect the data. It provides continent wide population data which can be used to estimate relative abundance and population trends. It uses rigorous protocols designed to minimize variables involved in data collection that can eschew established data on breeding populations. Amateur birder participants must pass a brief training course to ID local birds by sight and sound. The surveys follow specific routes at peak breeding times of the year and specify time of day including weather conditions. All habitats from rich to marginal are included. Each survey route is 24.5 miles long with a series of 50 stops done at ½ mile intervals for a 3 minute point count of birds seen and heard within a .25 mile radius. The BBS differs from eBird in: (1) There is strict uniform protocol for observations on uniform routes; (2) Observers are selected based on a level of field knowledge and can be removed; (3) There is random sampling in every type of habitat; and (4) It is more useful for estimating trend data.

Nick Newbery presented his experiences last summer in a program titled: *A Day in the Life: Working with the Alaska Fish and Game* where he studied the Olive-sided Flycatcher in Fairbanks Alaska. The purpose was to try to pinpoint a reason for the 80% population decline in the last 15 years. Light level geolocators are used to collect data about their migration to Central and South America. Nick showed how the birds are netted close to their nests by using the site and sound of their primary enemy, the red squirrel. The birds are measured and geolocators removed if present and 36 more geolocators were deployed. Current speculation about decline include increased rate of habitat destruction, rising levels of mercury, profound changes of diet due to habitat destruction and climate change altering insect availability, and slow reproductive rate.

**Field Trips:** Jim Corliss, Field Trip Coordinator, commented on the success of the January field trip to Dutch Gap and briefly reported on the following upcoming trips and activities.

- **Saturday, February 6:** Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Boat Trip. There are still spaces available so sign-up now as the trip will be open to rest of VA birders in a couple of days.
- **Saturday, February 20:** Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel's three islands. The 30 available spaces are already filled and there are 3 people on a wait list. We will car pool at Colony Square Shopping Center at 7:30 am. Birding starts at 9 am.
- **Saturday, March:** Curles Neck. Jim is negotiating with the landowners to set a date.
- **Saturday, April:** Dismal Swamp
- **Saturday, May:** Matt Anthony is working on organizing a trip to Highland County where a lot of warblers breed. The trip may necessitate an overnight stay.
- **Sunday, May 15:** Spring Bird Count

**Programs:** Cheryl Jacobson, Program Coordinator, reported on upcoming programs for WBC meetings.

- **February:** Brian Watts will deliver a program focusing on the realized mortality rates of shorebirds from hunting and man-made structures, etc. and whether these populations have the capacity to still reach management objectives for species conservation concern.
- **March:** Ashley Peele, PhD., who is the coordinator for the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas will discuss the newly established protocol for this project. Many volunteers will be needed.
- **April:** The W&M grad students who have received grants from our club will present their research.
- **May:** Bob Schamerhorn will return with a new program featuring warbler identification with photos and song.

**Announcements:**

- Geoff asked Mitchell Byrd to expand on the program Brian Watts will be delivering. Among the shorebirds discussed will be Osprey and Peregrine Falcons. Mitchell reported that due to a high (90%) mortality rate of Peregrine Falcon chicks from accidents such as falling from the nest into water or onto road beds, they've been harvesting chicks and releasing them in the mountains. He took the opportunity to point out that this year the Center for Conservation Biology is sponsoring a comprehensive survey of Bald Eagle nests. During the last 4 years, the focus has been on the Rappahannock and James Rivers. This year, it will include the entire Tidewater region from the Potomac River on down and will entail approx. 150 hours flying time. He requested that folks report the presence of Bald Eagle nests that he may have missed.
- Geoff announced that last year our club sponsored 3 grants to W&M graduate students and 1 to an undergraduate. This year we are able to afford an additional grant and Dan Cristol is determining who the worthy student will be. Geoff reminded us that this is made possible by our dues, book sales, donations, etc.
- Geoff announced that the Nature Camp Scholarship Committee had selected 3 deserving individuals to attend Nature Camp this summer. They will give a brief talk on their experiences at our next September meeting.
- Ruth Gordon, Co-chairperson of our Refreshments Committee announced that we still need volunteers to provide refreshments for April, May and October. Water is also needed for the February meeting.

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

Geoff adjourned the meeting at 8:30 pm.

Refreshments were provided by Cathy Millar.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club  
January 21, 2016

