

## **Williamsburg Bird Club**

*Wednesday, October 18, 2017*

Andrews Hall, Room 101, W&M, 7:00 pm

**Attendance:** 55

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

President Bill Williams welcomed the assembly and began by commenting on the success of our club's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting at the Williamsburg Public Library auditorium at which Dr. Mitchell Byrd's keynote speech was a highlight. A round of applause seconded this observation. The celebratory picnic at New Quarter Park featured yummy food from Smoke BBQ in Newport News and recognition of Molly Nealer who was retiring from York County Parks and Recreation after 40 years and has been a big supporter of our club's efforts at NQP since the park opened publicly in early 2000's.

He commented that there have been a number of enquiries from folks around town as well as on our club's web site about where are the birds! He noted that feeders are remaining full because there is still so much natural food. The cold front the previous night has already brought the first White-throated Sparrows. A Pine Siskin has shown up on the Eastern Shore and another at Virginia Beach holding promise for more finches to come.

### **Nature Camp Attendees Presentations:**

Bill declared that one of the hallmarks of what our club does every year and in which we take great pride is sending three students to Nature Camp. He called on Lee Schuster who helps coordinate the program to introduce the students who attended Nature Camp this last summer.

Lee Schuster presented Lindsay Maye, Franklin West and Ned Rose who each briefly described their 2 weeks experience. Their main focus of study varied from ornithology to geology but the enthusiasm and eagerness to return was a feature shared by each student as well as their gratitude to our club. Deadline for applications for next year is October 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **Life Membership Award:**

Bill presented to Alex Minarik who'd been absent from the anniversary meeting a Lifetime Membership Award for her many services to our club.

**Program:** Cheryl Jacobson, Vice President of Programs, introduced tonight's speaker, our very own president Bill Williams. Bill is retired from the Williamsburg-James City County Schools where he served as a teacher and K-12 Science and Mathematics Curriculum Coordinator for 31 years. He was involved in the founding of the Williamsburg Bird Club and the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. Bill is a past president of the Virginia Society of Ornithology and is currently a member of the VSO's Board of Directors. He was Chairman of the Virginia Avian Records Committee and is currently the Editor of the Virginia Society of Ornithology's quarterly journal, *Virginia Birds*, and is the Tidewater Region Reviewer for the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's citizen science eBird program. Bill was the Director of the Virginia Barrier Islands Colonial Waterbirds Survey for the Virginia Coast Reserve of The Nature Conservancy from 1975-2005 and was the Director of the Kiptopeke Hawk Watch from 1977-2005. Bill was a founding

member of the Historic Virginia Land Conservancy, serving 3 terms as its president. Bill edited **The Birds of Virginia's Colonial Historic Triangle** published by the Williamsburg Bird Club in 2012. He was a 1965 graduate of James Blair High School then graduated from Emory and Henry College in 1969. Bill holds a Master's Degree in Biology from the College of William and Mary. Bill and his wife, Arlene, own Morrison's Flowers and Gifts in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Bill gave an illustrated presentation on the birds of two of the Greater Antilles Islands gathered from his experiences conducting a research study in the Dominican Republic last December and birding in Puerto Rico this last March. He began by noting the difference between the terminology *endemic* and *indigenous*. Endemic means a native species exclusively unique to a place/island versus indigenous referring to a native species that may occur elsewhere. Birders love endemic species and Bill took care to identify in his presentation those that were endemic. Bill was engaged in a project organized by the Virginia Society of Ornithology and Earth Sangha, a non-profit public charity based in Fairfax Virginia whose mission is ecological restoration in the spirit of Buddhist practice. They operate Tree Bank Hispaniola which works with local land owners to propagate native trees to conserve tropical forests, promote sustainable agroforestry, provide financial resources for conservation activities on farms and then provide a market for shade grown coffee and cacao. Much of the landscape in the Dominican Republic and especially in Haiti has been denuded by such activities as sugar cane plantations or charcoal production leading to a habitat that is in desperate need of restoration that leads to soil stabilization, diversified source of income for the local people and improved air and water quality with reduced chemical input. The loss of habitat has led to a steady decline in the bird population. Earth Sangha was interested in the quality and quantity of bird life in the reforestation project areas as the birds are great environmental indicators as to how effective the project is. Bill was part of a team with other folks familiar to the bird club including Bill Akers, Dave Youker, Bob Ake and the current VSO president Lenny Bankester. They were in the Dominican Republic in December 2016 when it is providing critical winter habitat to sustain overwintering neotropical migrants. The hope of the project is to get the local folks to understand and appreciate what is happening to their bird populations and that that will increase their interest in agroforestry. Bill reported that research has shown that females and males segregate during migration and go to the same places on the Caribbean Islands year after year where the males will faithfully return to the same little spot in the same forest and defend it throughout their lifetime. He showed us the rugged primitive conditions that their host families lived in and who made them feel very welcome. Their daily protocol entailed teams of 2 rotating through 3 different sites over 3 days during which they tallied every bird by species and abundance. Site 1 was a hectare of recently planted legumes where over a 3 day period they counted a total of 157 birds of 27 species of which 8 were neotropical migrants. Another site was a forest remnant that yielded 142 birds with 30 species of which 9 were neotropical migrants. The third site was a coffee plantation that yielded 210 birds and 27 species of which 7 were neotropical migrants. He showed us pictures of some of the neotropical migrants they saw many of which were familiar to us here at home: American Redstart, Northern Parula, Ovenbird, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Cape May Warbler and the Common Yellowthroat. He showed us striking photos of endemic birds including the Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, Hispaniolan Emerald Hummingbird, Narrow-billed Tody, Thick-billed Tody, Black-crowned Palm-Tanager and

Hispaniolan Spindalis. Bill was surprised to see Northern Mockingbirds who are indigenous and saw other familiar species such as American Kestrel and Cattle Egrets. He noted that all the birds were very quiet which made locating them all the more difficult. They also brought binoculars and field guides for the local school.

Bill finished his presentation with lovely photos of the birds he and his wife, Arlene, saw on a birding tour trip they took in March in 2017 in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Again he differentiated the endemic from indigenous species. He was thrilled to see a wild Puerto Rican Parrot whose population had been reduced to 13 in 1975 and nearly all that are extant now are banded. After the devastation that recent Hurricane Maria has wrought, he has been very concerned about what these parrots and many other birds will have left to eat. He noted that on another island where several thousand Magnificent Frigatebirds nest, reports are coming in that all the vegetation has been totally blasted away! There is great concern about what effect this particularly vicious hurricane season will have on many species. Bill showed us a Sharp-shinned Hawk subspecies that will probably soon become its own species due to reproductive isolation. Another species of interest was the Yellow-shouldered Blackbird which is critically endangered due to loss of mangrove habitat and parasitism by Shiny Blackbirds. We saw great photos of endemic species such as the Puerto Rican Nightjar, Puerto Rican Lizard Cuckoo, Puerto Rican Tody, Puerto Rican Spindalis (national bird), Puerto Rican Emerald Hummingbird and Green-breasted Mango. Puerto Rico also has an endemic flycatcher, woodpecker, oriole and pewee. Puerto Rico also has the African Collared-Dove that is so similar to the Eurasian Collared-Dove that they interbreed creating hybrids.

Bill concluded by announcing that he and the team will be returning to the Dominican Republic to conduct a second year survey in January 2018. The VSO has provided a grant for a graduate student from ODU who will meet them to help sustain this project.

### **Upcoming Events:**

**Programs:** Cheryl Jacobson, VP and Program Chairperson, reported on our next meeting's program.

- **Wednesday, November 15:** Dr. Bryan Watts, director of the Center for Conservation Biology, will present highlights of the projects they've been working on.

**Field Trips:** Shirley Devan, Field Trip Coordinator, reported on an upcoming field trip.

- **Saturday, October 21:** Grandview Nature Preserve in Hampton. Carpooling at 7 am at Old Colony Square on Jamestown Road.

**Christmas Bird Count:** Jim Corliss, Bird Count Chairperson, reminded us that the Christmas Bird Count is on December 17<sup>th</sup> and that the goal is for over a hundred participants.

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

Bill adjourned the meeting at 8:12 pm.

Refreshments were provided by Barbara Neis and Nancy Barnhart.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club  
October 22, 2017