

Williamsburg Bird Club
Wednesday, February 21, 2018
Andrews Hall, Room 101, W&M, 7:00 pm

Attendance: 84

President's Remarks:

President Cheryl Jacobson greeted the joint assembly of the Williamsburg Bird Club and Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists.

Year of the Bird: The January meeting had been canceled due to snow so this was the first one of 2018. She remarked that this is also the Year of the Bird in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the most important and powerful bird protection law ever passed. Audubon has joined with Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Park Service, National Geographic, Bird Life International and more than 100 other organizations to use this year to heighten public awareness of birds and how they can take simple steps to help them. There will also be emphasis on how changing climate and ecosystems is impacting bird species around the globe.

New Members: Cheryl was pleased to report that there have been over a dozen new members since the last meeting. She invited them to stand up and be acknowledged.

Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists Cheryl next asked that the Master Naturalists please stand to which nearly half the assembly rose. She then asked that those who were also members of the Williamsburg Bird Club remain standing. Nearly half did so showing how many of our members have dual membership.

Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas: Cheryl reported that this is the third year of the BBA and stressed that this is an important initiative for both clubs. She noted that it is an approved project for earning master naturalist hours. Training opportunities will be announced.

Refreshments: Cheryl thanked the following folks who had brought refreshments: Judy Jones, Sharon Plocher, Nancy Barnhart, Patty Maloney and Jan Lockwood. A sign-up list was passed around for folks to volunteer for future refreshments.

Field Trips: Geoff Giles, Field Trip Coordinator, reported on upcoming field trips.

- **Sunday, March 11th.** Geoff was pleased to report that our next field trip will be led by Ellison Orcutt to Curles Neck, a premier birding area on private property. The trip is limited to 20 people on a first sign-up basis with priority given to club members.

Program: Jan Lockwood substituting for Judy Jones, Program Chairperson, introduced the speakers Cassie Landon, Jennifer Lafontaine and Diane Mutton who are specialists in caring for the animals, birds and reptiles at Busch Gardens and educating the public about wildlife and wildlife conservation. . She noted that the Sea World and Busch Gardens Conservation Fund has donated over fourteen million dollars to conservation efforts since its inception in 2003.

Jennifer began by telling us about recent new avian additions to Busch Gardens. Their aviary now includes 2 exotic looking Lady Ross's Turacos, a species that are the only ones to have true red pigment in their feathers. Six months ago a white Homing pigeon whose banding showed that it had come from New Jersey was found at Busch Gardens and given a home and the name Pearl since the owner could not be found. Last month they received two rescue Bald Eagles, Taft and Roosevelt, bringing their total number of Bald Eagles to six.

As she was talking, a lovely predominantly chestnut-red Harris's Hawk named Diane was being brought around the room by a coworker for us to get a close look. Whereas in the wild, the normal life span is 12-15 years, Diane is a feisty 27 years old who's been known to fly into the Bald Eagle sanctuary.

Harris's Hawks are native to the Southwestern US down to Central America and parts of S America. An unusual feature of this raptor is that they hunt cooperatively in packs of 2-5 hawks like wolves so they are able to capture bigger prey, like jack rabbits, that they could not do on their own. With a shortage of tall trees in their habitat, they also have the unusual behavior of 'stacking' whereupon up to 4 birds with the most dominant one on top will stand on each other's backs to better see prey and predators.

The next guest looked almost more like a Muppet than a bird with its large head and abnormally wide and triangular shaped beak that is used to catch insects and rodents. Hatched at a San Antonio Zoo, it was an almost 3 year old Tawny Frogmouth named Pistachio because of the lime-green color of the inside of its mouth. They are native to Australia and Tasmania and in the nightjar family. They are weak fliers and spend most of the time camouflaged using a behavior called 'stumping' wherein the bird holds its body upright with feathers held in tight and eyes closed so it resembles the stump of a branch. Unlike most birds of prey, they have weak feet with which they are unable to grasp their prey so instead will grab a rodent with the beak and fling it against a tree and swallow it whole.

The third guest was a 7 year old Barn Owl whose name was Cupid because of its heart-shaped face. His parents were rescue cases at a W VA facility and he was hatched under human care, hand-raised and deemed as not releasable since he doesn't know how to hunt. The Barn Owl's exceptional hearing with their asymmetrically placed ears was put to a test in an indoor stadium where mice had been released on a leaf littered floor. After the owls were acclimated, the lights were turned off and the owls were able to catch the mice in complete darkness. Contrary to legends of being wise, an owl is difficult to train because the brain is smaller than one of its big eyeballs since the eyeballs take up most of the space in the head. Jennifer pointed out that with 40 neck vertebrae compared to our 7, they can rotate their head 270 degrees both ways compared to our 90 degree rotation. They are native to every continent except Antarctica. In the 3 months of a nesting pair raising 5 chicks, they can kill close to 5,000 mice! Owls do not have a crop whereas other raptors do which along with low acidity of digestive juices is why owls 'cast' or spit-up pellets of bones, feather, fur and insect parts.

The grand finale was Lincoln, an almost 5 year old Bald Eagle. Since he is just reaching maturity, his head feathers were not completely white but had a slight brown cast. His eyes are also slowly lightening from brown to bright yellow. All of the 6 bald eagles at Busch Gardens are rescues. Five have permanent wing injuries. The oldest is Penny who is over 40 years old. Lincoln was found as a fledgling with an ulcer in his left eye. He was treated at the Audubon Bird of Prey Center in Maitland, Florida (Jennifer urged us to take one of their tours) and Lincoln arrived at Busch Gardens shortly afterwards. He is fully flighted which he kept displaying by impressively flapping his wings. Bald Eagles are a great symbol of conservation efforts. In the 1960's there were fewer than 500 pairs in North America. Measures esp.

banning DDT have led to a remarkable comeback and they are no longer endangered although still federally protected. Any feathers that the Bald Eagles drop are required by law to be sent to the Fish and Wildlife Services who give most of them to Native Americans for making ceremonial pieces. This led to Jennifer discussing the importance of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act established in 1918. This Act is now being threatened by the Trump administration with proposals to allow industries to kill birds with impunity and remove incentive for companies to take common sense precautions. She urged us to go to www.audubon.org and click on the article about the Act. There is a Take Action button to click and it takes just a couple of minutes to fill out a protest which is sent to our political representatives. Jennifer and her coworkers ended their presentation with the Red-shouldered Hawk, Diane, taking a couple of very low flights over the thrilled audience and a meet-and-greet with a couple of the birds.

Announcements:

- **Migratory Bird Treaty Act:** Cheryl reiterated the importance of protesting any changes to the Act. Last week she had sent an email to club members giving contact info and a sample letter to send. She will share this email with members of the Master Naturalists.
- **Newsletter:** Cheryl reminded that photos and stories need to be sent to our newsletter editor, Melinda Cousins, soon for the next newsletter.
- **Dues** Please pay your 2018 dues!
- **Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas:** Cheryl announced that the state coordinator for the VBBA will be doing a training session at the invitation of the Hampton Roads Bird Club on Saturday, April 14th. It will probably be held at Sandy Bottom Park at 8. Cheryl will email the details when determined to members of both WBC and Master Naturalists.
- **Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists:** Shirley Devan talked about what the Master Naturalists program does for the benefit of the WBC members. It is a core of volunteers trained to be citizen scientists, stewards and educators and help Virginia's organizations and agencies conserve natural resources. The group works with about every environmental and conservation organization in our local community. The chapter was one of the first in Virginia and founded in 2007. The next basic training designed to learn to become a Master Naturalist and how to volunteer starts this coming September.

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

Cheryl adjourned the meeting at 8:20 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club
February 22, 2018