

Williamsburg Bird Club
Wednesday, October 17, 2018
W&M Integrated Science Center, Room 1127, 7:00 pm

Attendance: 54

President's Remarks: President Cheryl Jacobson opened the meeting and welcomed the assembly.

Program: Judy Jones, VP and Program Chairperson, introduced the speaker, Dr. John Swaddle, W&M biology professor since 2001 and cofounder with Dr. Dan Cristol of the Institute for Integrative Bird Behavior Studies. Dr. Swaddle delivered the fascinating presentation: *Developing an 'Acoustic Lighthouse' to Reduce Birds' Risk of Collision in Flight*. He coined the term 'Acoustic Lighthouse' to describe the technology that he and former W&M grad student, Nicole Ingrassia (a former recipient of our club's grad student grant) have been developing.

He reported that annually one billion birds die from collisions with tall structures such as skyscrapers, cell phone towers and wind turbines. For bird species that are already at risk, these collisions can put them at risk for local extinctions. There is a great need for a decent balance between bird conservation and economic development. Whole wind farms have been shut down for weeks because of one single bird collision of a species of concern. Out west, Duke Energy was fined one million dollars for a Golden Eagle strike against a wind turbine. On the East coast, the planning of offshore and near-shore wind development has raised great concern about impact on birds.

He described birds being vulnerable due to their eyes being widely spaced on the sides of their head so they are looking down and to the side when flying in a normal horizontal position which optimizes flight and minimizes aerodynamic drag. But this leaves a big blind spot directly in front of them. The challenge therefore is to find a way to get birds to slow down and look up in time to avoid tall obstacles. He likened it to the need for honking a horn to alert a texting driver.

Using a mist net as a nonlethal obstacle, he and Nicole experimented with 16 captive Zebra Finches to find what would alert the birds to the obstacle. They found that a column of sound placed in front of the net slowed the birds down as they 'put their brakes on' by angling their tail underneath their body and became more vertical so that they noticed the net. Two birds even avoided it. The data implied that sound in front of a structure reduces the risk of collision. Highlighting the importance of just getting birds to slow down, he noted that birds in the wild that hit an obstacle in a more vertical posture rather than head-on have a better chance of survival. Field tests are now needed to see if birds in the wild will respond in a similar way. Working with colleagues at Purdue University to discover what type of sound is most noticeable to birds in a natural environment, they found that high-pitched sweeping sounds not normally heard stimulated the most neurological activity in many species. Specially designed one way directional focused beamed speakers are being made in Bulgaria. Field tests starting here on cell towers in Williamsburg are scheduled to begin this coming spring. There is great hope that in the future the 'Acoustic Lighthouse' concept can save the lives of thousands, perhaps millions of birds.

Announcements:

- Cheryl enquired if there were any new members in the assembly. One person was recognized.

- Cheryl asked Jeanne and Mike Millin to come to the front of the room to be recognized. Their son, Michael and daughter-in-law, Amy, have established an endowment to the Williamsburg Bird Club that will annually fund a Nature Camp Scholarship in the Millins' name. Cheryl quoted from an article in *Williamsburg Community Foundation* that described the Millins' love of nature and their desire to pass on that love to the next generation. The Williamsburg Community Foundation will manage the endowment. Jeanne added that she credits her 19 year old grandson majoring in Environmental Studies to Bill Williams who had infected her grandson when he was 10 years old with a love for birds. Cheryl noted that this scholarship will be in addition to three existing Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships.
- Cheryl reported that through our WBC website, someone indicated that they have a 10 year old Blue-and-Gold Macaw in need of rehoming. Anyone interested should contact Cheryl for the email of the current owners.
- Cheryl announced that our club's bylaws state that the annual election of our Executive Board is held on the last meeting of our club which is in November. Normally a nominating committee is formed in October to develop a slate of nominees. This year presents a different situation because the entire Executive Board would like to serve another year. So the slate to be presented to the membership in November will be as follows: President-Cheryl Jacobson, Vice-President (Programs) – Judy Jones, Vice-President (The Flyer) – Melinda Cousins, Treasurer – Ann Carpenter, Secretary – Cathy Millar, Member-at-Large – Gary Carpenter and Member-at-Large- Shirley Devan. Nominations from the floor will be welcomed at the November meeting and we will vote at that time. There were no questions or comments from the assembly.
- Cheryl showed a lovely Birding and Wildlife Trail brochure by the Division of Game and Inland Fisheries that our club helped fund. Brochures were made available for our members to inspect.
- Dan Cristol expressed great regret that a club member had been unable to attend tonight's meeting due to inability to walk the long distance from the Phi Beta Kappa parking lot to the Integrated Science Building. He reported that folks can be dropped off in front of the building on Landrum Drive where it is a short walk through the front doors to the lecture hall. There is no permissible parking on that side however so the driver would still need to park at Phi Beta Kappa area.

Programs: Judy Jones, VP (Programs) reported on the following upcoming speakers;

- **Wednesday, November 14:** Fletcher Smith will talk about his research conducted in the Arctic during three summers spent living in a tent. She stressed that this is the 2nd and not usual 3rd Wednesday to avoid being too close to Thanksgiving. The Historic Rivers Chapter of the Master Naturalists will join us.
- **December:** No club meeting.
- **Wednesday, January 15, 2019:** Bob Schamerhorn will give an illustrated presentation about Atlantic coastal birds.

Bird Counts/Bird Walks: Jim Corliss, Bird Count Chairperson, was absent.

Field Trips: Geoff Giles, Field Trip Coordinator, recognized W&M student Andrew Rapp for being an excellent leader on our October field trip to the Eastern Shore.

- **Saturday, November 17:** Beaverdam Park, Gloucester. Specifics to be sent out via email.
- **Sunday, December 16th:** Christmas Bird Count in lieu of a field trip.
- **Sunday, January 20th:** Our annual boat trip on the Chesapeake Bay. Geoff urged us to respond as quickly as possible when the sign-up email is sent in December. Because the CBBT islands are closed to birding, he's been receiving much more interest about the boat trip from folks outside our bird club. Bird club members have first choice.

The Flyer: Melinda Cousins, Newsletter Vice President, will be gone for four weeks to attend boot camp and a pleasure trip to France. Shirley Devan has volunteered to organize the November issue of The Flyer in her absence. Shirley requested that anything to be put in the next newsletter be submitted to her by October 21st as she will be leaving for France October 27th.

Refreshments: Chairperson Barbara Neiss reported that refreshments are accounted for up to and including June 2019. Tonight's refreshments were provided by Judy Jones and Daniel Keener.

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

Cheryl adjourned the meeting at 8:10 pm and refreshments were served.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club,
October 23, 2018