

Williamsburg Bird Club

Wednesday, November 14, 2018

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

Attendance: 83

President's Remarks: President Cheryl Jacobson opened the meeting and welcomed the assembly of members of the Williamsburg Bird Club and Historic River Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists at this joint meeting. She invited members of each club to take turns standing and be recognized and also those, of which there were a sizeable number, who were members of both clubs. There were two visitors.

Announcements: Announcements were made that related to both clubs. Cheryl explained that there are bird club projects like the Christmas Bird Count and Project Feeder Watch at which master naturalists can earn service credits and also activities like the two upcoming field trips at which they can earn continuing education credits.

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

- **Saturday, November 17:** Beaverdam Park, Gloucester with Andrew Rapp as leader. Geoff reported that pond scum on the lake resulting from nutrification is bringing the feeding ducks in closer to shore than usual. Carpool/caravan will meet at Old Colony Shopping Center on Jamestown Road and depart at 8:00 am.
- **Sunday, January 20:** Annual boat trip on the Chesapeake Bay. It will be announced to bird club members in December to allow them the opportunity to sign up first. He encouraged folks to update their membership to be sure they are invited. Afterwards tickets will be open to all. A high demand is expected as the bridge tunnel islands are closed to birding this year.

Christmas Bird Count: Jim Corliss, Bird Count Chairperson, reported that this year's count will be held on Sunday, December 16th. He invited everyone to participate by either joining a team in the field or as a feeder watcher. He stated that there are usually equal numbers of both groups. Recently there have been at least 100 participants and a couple of years ago there were more observers than species! He invited those who were unsure how to participate to contact him.

Announcements from President Adrienne Frank of the Master Naturalist Club:

- Adrienne displayed an award given the club by the Virginia Parks and Recreation Society for their 2500 hours of service.
- Master Naturalist holiday party is to be held on December 12th and she requested that folks reserve a spot if planning to coming.
- It is time for the annual report and Adrienne requested that members submit their number of service hours. The final tally is sent to the state.

- Adrienne reported that they are working on a new budget and asked that members send in any budget requests now.

Refreshments: Refreshment chairperson, Barbara Neiss, reported that bird club members, Lisa Nickel and Ginny Broome, and master naturalists, Julia and Bob Thomas, provided tonight's goodies.

Project Feeder Watch: Cheryl reminded us that it was not too late to sign up for Project Feeder Watch and get the kit.

Annual Bird Club Election: Cheryl noted that our bylaws require us to elect executive officers in November. The following current officers were asked to stand:

- 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
- Past President – Bill Williams

Cheryl announced that the current Executive Board has volunteered to serve another year. She asked for nominations from the bird club members. There were none. The nominations were closed by Geoff Giles and seconded and approved unanimously. A motion that this slate of officers be approved for 2019 was made by George Martin and seconded by Dan Cristol. The slate was unanimously elected by the bird club members without further discussion.

Program: Judy Jones, VP and Program Chairperson, introduced the speaker, Fletcher Smith. Fletcher, a research biologist at the Center for Conservation Biology, works with a diversity of bird species throughout the western hemisphere following migrants from their breeding to winter grounds. His current research projects include work with Whimbrels, Red Knots, Marsh Sparrows, and neo-tropical migrants. In addition, he also conducts breeding bird surveys, manages the Saw-whet Owl banding program, and is the Center's primary rocket netter. In tonight's program, *Research and Live above the Arctic Circle*, Fletcher gave us all a feeling of what it would be like to live on the Mackenzie Delta, Canada along the Beaufort Sea at the 68th latitude doing field research in 2012 - 2014 and Bathurst Island at Polar Bear Pass NWA, Canada at the 75th latitude in 2015. For 4 summers where the sun never sets he lived in primitive field camps. Each expedition required having 10,000 pounds of gear flown in via de Havilland-Canada Twin Otters onto a runway in the middle of nowhere and from there brought to the camp via helicopter with the supplies carried on slings hanging beneath. Each research team had 4-5 scientists with Fletcher being the only American, the rest being Canadians. Average daytime temp was mid 50's for a high. Tents were ringed by a bear fence for tripping bears to give warning if one took an interest in them during the night. We saw what a 7 week food shopping list looks like. They estimated that each person required three pounds of food daily to fuel walking about 10 miles per day with 30-40 pound backpacks full of equipment and to be able to cope with the constant cold. A shotgun was always at hand in case of a bear encounter. Their diet was supplemented by raw whale

blubber, caribou ribs and stomach, smoked fish, and geese given them by local hunters. Fletcher was impressed that folks in such a harsh environment are quick to share when supplies are plentiful.

The purpose of their field studies was to determine the productivity and success of nesting birds. Their data fed into models to determine whether the Arctic was productive enough to support an increase in population with enough eggs hatching each year or whether the Arctic is part of the problem that 80% of long distance shore birds are in decline. Examples given were that Red Knots have declined 90% since the 1980's and Whimbrels have declined at least 50% since the mid 1990's. He shared photos showing how very challenging it was to find the perfectly camouflaged nests and the birds on them. He said that one could stand six inches from the occupied nest of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, Stilt Sandpiper or Pectoral Sandpiper without the bird flushing or making a noise. Whereas camouflaged nests of the Black-bellied Plover and Parasitic Jaeger were easier to find because they put on the broken wing display when he got close. We learned that all female phalaropes have bright plumage because they lay up to four nests and it is the dull colored males that incubate them. Part of their field work also included trapping and Nano-tagging birds or attaching satellite transmitters for tracking. The nest predators noted were Ravens, Jaegers, Peregrine Falcons, Snowy Owls, Sandhill Cranes, Bears, Arctic and Red Fox. Fletcher observed a high count of 27 Snowy Owl nests on just one day. He reported that a lot of the birds didn't seem to have any fear of humans, allowing them to get quite close. We saw great photos of Musk Ox, Caribou, Bearded Seal, Peary Caribou and clouds of mosquitoes. These Arctic mosquitoes can reproduce by feeding on the nectar of flowers but produce fewer young as a result. They prefer blood meals and swarmed the biologists so that wearing bug nets all the time was a must.

Fletcher noted that based on the work they did there, they have been able to create programs that have reduced the hunting pressure on these migratory birds in the Caribbean and northern South America, and also to track a number of these species and discover their activity between wintering and breeding grounds.

To date, research is indicating that the warming climate in the Arctic is also contributing to the decline of shore birds. Lemmings are an important part of the life cycle in the Arctic. Some areas have not had a spike in lemming population for decades. This is thought to be because due to warming, snow packs in those areas are not as deep and lemmings can't burrow deep enough to keep from freezing. A decrease in the number of lemmings has a domino effect on the rest of the wildlife, including the birds.

Our fascinating tour concluded with an invitation to feel Musk Ox hair and wool that Fletcher had gathered on these trips.

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

Cheryl adjourned the meeting at 8:05 pm and refreshments were served.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club,
November 16, 2018

