

Williamsburg Bird Club
Wednesday, February 20, 2019
W&M Integrated Science Center, Room 1127, 7:00pm

Attendance: 48

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

Field Trips: George Martin, Field Trip Coordinator, reported on the following recent trips:

- **February 3rd Chesapeake Bay Boat Trip:** Very successful trip of 61 participants led by Ellison Orcutt with Andrew Rapp as eBird recorder and 45 species noted.
- **February 16th Dutch Gap:** Rose Ryan led 3 hardy souls in cold wet conditions. They spotted 29 species before sleet cut the trip short.

George reported on the following upcoming field trips:

- **Sunday, March 3rd:** Curles Neck led by Ellison Orcutt. The trip is fully subscribed and George requested that he be alerted if anyone needs to cancel as there is a waiting list.
- **Saturday, March 16th:** Back Bay NWR, Rudee Inlet and Little Island led by Matt Anthony with carpooling from Colony Square at 7:30am.

Bird Counts/Bird Walks: Jim Corliss, Bird Counts/Walks Chairperson, recording on the following:

- **Saturday, February 23rd:** New Quarter Park at 8:00 am
- **Sunday, April 28th:** Spring Bird Count
- Cheryl Jacobson reported that other clubs are combining photography walks with bird walks and that we are going to hold one in May led by Judy Jones, Barbara Houston and Cheryl Jacobson at Chickahominy Park.
- Shirley Devan reported that on the February 9th Yorktown River Bird Walk they saw a Common Goldeneye and a Greater Scaup which turned up on the rare bird list. There were 18 participants on a very cold raw day.
- It was noted that alternating bird walks at different locations has proven very successful with good turnouts.

Program: Judy Jones, VP (Programs) introduced our speaker, Sergio Harding, who has been a Nongame Bird Conservation Biologist with Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries since 2005. He serves as the DGIF point of contact for the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas and works with the atlas coordinator on VABBA2 planning and promotion. Sergio also is the Virginia coordinator of Breeding Bird Survey and regularly participates in and directs avian field projects including surveys of breeding land birds, marsh birds, Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, Golden-winged Warblers, Loggerhead Shrikes, Piping Plovers and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. The title of his presentation was **The Golden-winged Warbler in VA: Bird Conservation from a State Wildlife Agency Perspective.**

Sergio explained that the DGIF was established in 1916 to regulate hunters and fishermen but that their mission was broadened in the early 1990's to include nongame. Subsequently biologists of a wide range of expertise have been hired. Sergio is one of three who's full time focus is birds. Virginia has

one of the highest bird diversities in the Eastern United States with over 400 species that use the state at some point in their life cycle. Sergio used the Golden-winged Warbler as a case study of how DGIF approaches bird conservation through their agency programs of Regulatory Review, Land Acquisition, Habitat Management, Education and Outreach, Conservation Planning and Research and Monitoring.

The Golden-winged Warbler is one of 80 species of greatest conservation need in the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan. This New World warbler weighs only approximately .4oz and as a neotropical migrant, flies more than 2,000 miles from breeding sites in NA to Latin America. Their numbers are sharply declining largely thought to be due to habitat loss and the species is currently being petitioned for federal listing under the Endangered Species Act. We learned that there are two distinct populations: one in the Upper Great Lakes and the other in the Appalachians from New York to Georgia. The Virginia population returns late April and prefers shrubby open habitats at mid to high elevations where they build nests often at the base of blackberry bushes. They also need nearby mature forests to bring their fledglings for safety. Historically they benefited from forest fires and clearing by settlers but those areas have grown back and humans have suppressed fires and flooding from opening new areas. Much of Sergio's work has been done in SW Virginia. DGIF helps preserve habitat by prescribed burning, thinning, mulching and timber harvest.

Another factor in their decline is unique to Golden-winged Warblers. They share 99.8% of their DNA with Blue-winged Warblers. In areas of close contact, they interbreed and produce two different usually fertile hybrids varying extensively in appearance: Brewster's and Lawrence's. The Brewster's is the result of pure Golden-winged and pure Blue-winged parents. The Lawrence's is rarer as it is the result of recessive genes from 2 first generation Brewster's Warbler parents.

DGIF collaborates with other groups such as W&M's Center for Conservation Biology to conduct surveys to determine geographic distribution and population trends. Golden-wings used to be found in 20 counties in VA and now are in only 15. Golden-wings are secretive and not easy to spot and often require using playback of male bird song which increases detectability by 33%. Research has shown that Golden-wings prefer already occupied nesting areas and indicates that there is a possibility of using playback to lure Golden-wings to suitable habitat that is vacant and may be a management tool to expand their range.

Sergio described another ecological research project that DGIF is helping conduct that involves putting geolocators via tiny harnesses on these tiny birds for which satellite transmitters are too heavy. Geolocators collect two data points per day: time of sunrise and time of sunset. From these one can get rough coordinates of where the bird has been. These geolocators don't transmit data which means that not only does a Golden-wing need to be caught in a mist net to put the geocator on but that a year later the bird needs to be caught again to retrieve it! A total of 450 geolocators were put on Golden-wings, Blue-wings and hybrids across their North American range, of which 76 were retrieved and only 48 had retrievable data that was not damaged by moisture. In Virginia, 25 geolocators were fitted; 5 were retrieved and 2 had retrievable data. The data showed strong evidence that the birds flew over the Gulf of Mexico; made their way over Central America and wintered in north and central Venezuela. Whereas data from the Great Lakes population showed that they wintered in Central America. The Great Lakes population is relatively stable. The fact that Appalachian population is in decline suggests there is a problem in their wintering grounds in S America where they may be losing habitat. Shade grown coffee and cacao plantations offer ideal conditions.

Sergio is working on improving suitable habitat at 3700-4100ft elevation sites in Highland County. DGIF is also involved in the program Working Lands for Wildlife which is geared toward getting landowners to engage in land management for the benefit of Golden-wing Warblers using established guidelines. Expenses incurred are refunded by the government.

To understand what motivates people to engage in bird conservation and understand their attitudes about habitat management and perception of obstacles in carrying them out, DGIF is also involved in Private Landowner Shrubland Management Survey. The results of these surveys of landowners in five western VA counties will be used to create effective communication in outreach efforts. Conservation on private lands is thought to be one of the biggest game changers for the conservation of the Golden-winged Warbler.

The Golden-winged Warbler Working Group loosely coordinates all these activities by state and federal agencies, universities and organizations as well as those in Canada, Central and South America.

Cheryl Jacobson presented Sergio Harding with an honorarium which Sergio gave back to be donated to our Nature Camp Scholarship program.

Announcements:

- Cheryl noted that she's been getting good feedback that folks have appreciated her tips in the President's Corner of The Flyer about things we can do to help the environment and subsequently birds. More tips will be featured in the next issue and Cheryl brought one of them for us to inspect: toilet paper made from recycled paper!
- Cheryl reported to the membership that the WBC Board had voted to donate \$500 to support the Cloud Forest Conservation Project. She showed us a thank you note along with a picture of a bird drawn by one of the school children. We have also received thank you notes for the club's donations to the Williamsburg Regional Library, Center for Conservation Biology and The Historic Virginia Land Conservancy.
- Cheryl announced that the club is continuing to make plans for hosting the 2020 VSO Annual Meeting. Dr. Bryan Watts will be the keynote speaker.
- Rexanne Bruno reported that the 2019 VSO Annual Meeting will be held May 3-5 at Mountain Lake Lodge in Pembroke, VA. It will be a great place to bird for higher elevation species. The keynote speaker is the VP of The American Bird Conservancy. There will be a link on the WBC website for more information.
- Cheryl reminded the membership to pay their dues.
- Cheryl announced that the Purple Martin Project is being resurrected after having fallen by the wayside years ago. She noted that Purple Martins are becoming an increasing a species of concern. She said there are plans to install martin houses and organize volunteers to monitor and maintain them. Geoff Giles said they are hoping to get boxes up by March before Purple Martin scouts arrive. He said they will definitely need volunteers.
- Cheryl thanked Melinda Cousins of Backyard Birder for her donations to the bird club as well as her offer to partially fund one of the martin houses. She also thanked Wild Birds Unlimited for their donations this month.

Programs: Judy Jones, (VP Programs) reported on upcoming programs.

- **March 20th:** The Biology of Feathers by Maureen Eiger
- **April 17th:** William and Mary 2018 three Grant Recipients
- **May 15th:** Birding in Guyana by Bill Williams

Refreshments: Catherine Flanagan, Refreshments Chairperson, reported that Lucille Kossodo provided tonight's goodies.

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

Cheryl adjourned the meeting at 8:25 pm and refreshments were served.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club
February 21, 2019