

## Williamsburg Bird Club

January 18, 2023

Conducted via Zoom only, invited by Ann Carpenter and presided by Nancy Barnhart, 7pm

**Attendance:** 63

**President's Remarks:** President Nancy Barnhart welcomed the attendees which included the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists and wished everyone a Happy New Year. She noted that there will be an effort to provide in-person face-to-face gatherings this year while keeping in mind ongoing health concerns. She congratulated Shirley Devan for having started 2023's club activities with the annual New Year's Day Bird and Birder Show held this time at New Quarter Park. For the second year in a row, the temperature for the event registered at a balmy near 70's F.

**Program: Pete Myers PhD:** Patty Maloney, Vice President, Programs, introduced the meeting's speaker ornithologist Pete Myers PhD from the Charlottesville area whose research has mostly focused on the ecology of shorebirds on sandy beaches. Noting unnatural behaviors in some of the birds he was studying spurred him to become one of the world's foremost scientific thinkers on the hormone-disrupting effects of toxic chemicals. His research has taken him from the Arctic Tundra of Alaska to the southern tip of South America but our presentation focused on the beaches of Point Reyes National Seashore and Bodega Bay north of San Francisco.

He described the challenges on California beaches, which are the same on our Virginia beaches, that shorebirds surmount in winter after having bred in the arctic. A major factor of their survival is mole crabs, aka sand crabs, *emerita analoga*, that live in the wave-washed zone of sandy beaches around the world. They are small crustaceans with barrel-shaped bodies, measuring 0.3 to 2 inches long and no bigger than a human thumb. They bury themselves in the sand under the water where they gather energy by filter feeding plankton and detritus from the receding waves. In his photos, he pointed out the many eyestalks that were the only visible part of the crab sticking above the sand and noted that we are watched by hundreds of these eyes as we stroll on a beach as there are up to 10,000 mole crabs per square meter (10.764 sq feet). If the crab is small, a shorebird can swallow it immediately but if it is large, bedlam ensues as nearby birds vie to grab the energy rich body.

Dr. Myer's National Geographic quality photos illustrated a variety of shorebirds hunting and defending their prey as well as bathing, preening, ejecting pellets of undigestible food, flying and defending their individual territories on what appears to be a featureless beach. Among the birds featured are Dunlins, Plovers, Willets, Godwits, Turnstones, Sandpipers and especially Sanderlings that he has studied for over 40 years.

Dr. Myers described having an intimate knowledge of the birds he is photographing as being key to his stunning photos that capture details of a bird's unique beauty. Knowing what the birds are about to do, he quietly positions himself as close as he can lying on the ground and begins shooting at 30 frames per second. A sequence of photos of sanderlings that he'd shown us was the result of taking 10,000 images over 3 days and then spending 10 weeks to select the best. He also gave credit to the camera he is currently using: the mirrorless digital Sony Alpha 1 that focuses with amazing speed on the eye of a bird. His stop action photos captured details of the shorebirds that evade the human eye.

## **Announcements:**

### **Field Trips – George Martin Field Trip Coordinator:**

- **Saturday, January 21:** Rose Ryan will lead a fieldtrip at the Henricus Park/Dutch Gap Conservation Area outside Richmond to look for wintering ducks. Meet in the parking lot for Henricus Park at 9:00 a.m. Plenty of space for parking so no car-pooling.
- **Saturday, February 18:** Rexanne Bruno will lead a field trip along the Colonial Parkway to see water birds on the York River and shoreline.
- **March 18:** Dave Youker will lead a field trip to Machicomoco State Park in Hayes, VA.

### **Bird Walks – Scott Hemler:**

- **Saturday, January 21:** Scott will lead an Owl Prowl at New Quarter Park between 6 and 8 pm. Meet in the parking lot. The staff at NQP had requested this owl walk.
- **Saturday, January 28:** Scott will lead the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday bird walk at NQP. Meet in the parking lot at 8 am.
- **Saturday, February 25:** Nancy Barnhart reported that Cape Henry Audubon had requested to join us for the walk. Nancy is looking forward to more joint ventures with other bird clubs.

**The Flyer:** Nancy Barnhart reported that the deadline for submissions to the February newsletter is January 27<sup>th</sup>. She encouraged members to submit photos, articles, book reviews, etc. to Mary Ellen Hodges.

**Membership Dues:** Nancy reminded us that club dues are due. Renewal can be made online at the [williamsburgbirdclub.org](http://williamsburgbirdclub.org) website or via the membership form at the back of January's newsletter.

**Contributions by Backyard Birder and Wild Birds Unlimited:** Nancy expressed gratitude to the two local bird supply stores. Backyard Birder gives members a 10% discount. Wild Birds Unlimited donates to our club 5% of sales pretax made by members. Remember to tell them you are a member.

**Wingspan:** Nancy reported that some members had received the game, Wingspan, for Christmas but weren't interested in keeping them. One game has already been donated to Nature Camp who were delighted to receive it. Ann and Gary Carpenter offered theirs at the meeting and it was claimed in minutes by another member.

**Programs – Patty Maloney, Vice President (Programs):** Patty announced the following:

- **Wednesday, February 15:** The meeting will be in person at the Williamsburg Library and on Zoom at 6 pm. This will be a joint meeting with the Historic Rivers Master Naturalists. The speaker will be Deb Woodward of AWARE Wildlife Rehabilitators. The title is Behind-the-Scenes Look at Wildlife Rehabilitation and what we need to know about rescuing wildlife. Some of their popular 'ambassador animals' will be brought to this presentation.
- Nancy reported that a subject at the next WBC Board meeting will be how to keep upcoming meetings sensitive to members' ongoing Covid concerns.

**Interesting Birds:** Nancy enquired about interesting observations. Nancy noted that a Short-eared Owl has been seen just as dark is falling in the Charlottesville area. Pete Myers reported an 'invasion' of Red-headed Woodpeckers in the Charlottesville area in places where they've not been seen before. We have

a steady population locally but some are also reporting seeing more here. Another member reported seeing a lot of early courting behavior in birds that is normally seen in February. There does seem to be a trend toward earlier courting behavior as the climate warms. Great Horned Owls are being seen on nests.

Nancy Barnhart adjourned the meeting at 8:10 pm

Respectfully Submitted

Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club

January 21, 2023