

Williamsburg Bird Club

January 17, 2024

Conducted via Zoon only, invited by Ann Carpenter and presided by VP Patty Maloney, 7pm

Attendance: 47

President's Remarks: Patty Maloney VP presided for Nancy Barnhart who is birding in India where she's reported seeing over 400 life birds. Patty welcomed the attendees and reported that there would be a short business meeting at the end.

Program: Birding New Zealand: Patty Maloney, Vice President, Programs, introduced the evening's speaker Dixie Sommers who lives in Alexandria, VA. and became a serious birder in 2006 when she retired from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and started counting birds instead. She is a board member of the VSO; member of the Northern VA Bird Club and Audubon Society of Northern VA.

Her presentation: *Exploring the Birds and Islands of New Zealand*, was full of wonderful photos and videos of many birds found nowhere else in the world. On the two big islands, North and South Islands, 53 of the species are endemic and another 9 species breed only in NZ but migrate elsewhere. In 2022, she toured from November 15 to December 1st with Field Guides Birding Tours, and explored the North and South Islands as well as Stewart Island. Before the tour, Dixie spent a week around Auckland while also adjusting to the 18 hours' time difference. By the end of the trip in a country slightly smaller than Colorado, she'd observed 135 species at 113 locations in a variety of habitats: marine, coastal, estuary, alpine, forest and wetlands. Observations were also made via 6 birding and pelagic boat rides and 9 ferry rides to and from a few of New Zealand's many islands. Besides the two major islands, North and South Islands, there are 700+ smaller islands of which she visited three. The presence of so many endemic birds is primarily due to New Zealand being so far from other land masses and being exposed to relatively recent human contact. New Zealand was the last Pacific area reached by Polynesian migration when the Māori arrived around 1200 AD. One hundred years after their arrival, the nine flightless Moa species (the largest being 12 ft in height with neck outstretched and weighing about 510 pounds) were extinct. The Māori also brought rats and dogs. Until then, the only native mammals were 2 species of bats. Then, Europeans brought sheep, pigs, rabbits, mice, cows, stoats, etc. which, along with habitat destruction and hunting, has caused the endangerment and extinction of many endemic fauna and flora. More than 40 of New Zealand's endemic birds are now extinct. There is an active and extensive program to eradicate invasives and prevent further extinctions.

The iconic and national bird of New Zealand is the flightless Kiwi with little vestigial wings. There are 5 species, of which, Dixie saw one, the Southern Brown Kiwi, on Stewart Island. She reported that you can hear it snuffling as it forages because its nostrils are at the end of its long beak when probing the ground for grubs, etc.

Dixie saw all 3 species of penguins, and showed us an adorable footage of Fiordland Penguins leaping on rocks. She photographed her 3,000th life bird, a Weka Rail, in a parking lot! She also saw the world's largest rail, the South Island Takahē, weighing 6 lbs. and 25 inches long. On a pelagic boat trip, she saw a variety of albatrosses including one of the world's largest flying birds, the Northern Royal Albatross with about a 9-10 ft wingspan and length of 45 inches. While she showed us a wide variety of petrels, we learned that their name 'petrel' is derived from their tending to patter their feet on water while foraging,

which reminded folk of St Peter walking on water. Dixie shared so many wonderful photos and descriptions of birds with intriguing names like Wrybill, Tūī, Stitchbird, and Kea, and endemic species from families familiar to us in Virginia, like the South Island Wren with its tiny stub of a tail and 4 species of shag which are members of the cormorant family.

Dixie concluded her presentation with photos of the many different habitats of New Zealand including the Southern Alps, a mountain range resulting from New Zealand sitting on top a tectonic plate with active volcanoes.

Announcements:

Dues: Patty Maloney reminded everyone that dues for 2024 are due and that one can renew via PayPal on our club's website or by mail using the membership form at the end of January issue of *The Flyer*.

Transfer of club records to W&M Swem Library: Patty reported that on Dec 15th, 2023, the club transferred ownership of our club records to W&M's Special Collections Research Center at Swem Library where they will be kept in safe storage and open to the public for viewing. The records contain a lot of research info dating back to 1979.

Bird Walks: Scott Hemler reported the following:

Saturday, January 20th: Scott will lead an Owl Prowl at New Quarter Park at 6pm. Folks should park and meet at the parking area by the front gate. Folks will walk into the park from there. It will be very cold so dress warm.

Saturday, January 27th: Scott will lead the monthly bird walk at New Quarter Park at 8am. Meet in the parking lot by the park office building.

Field Trips – George Martin , Field Trip Coordinator: George Martin reported the following:

Saturday, January 20th: Rose Ryan will lead the first field trip of the year at Dutch Gap Conservation Area in Chester, Virginia. Meet in the parking lot of the Henricus Historical Park at 9:00 a.m. The focus is on wintering waterfowl and although the marshes are frozen, George saw a good assortment of waterfowl around the lagoon the day before this meeting and thought it worth still going. Dress for very cold temperatures.

Saturday, February 17th: Rexanne Bruno will be leading a bird walk along the Yorktown Colonial Parkway. Details to come.

Bird Counts – Chairperson Jim Corliss: Patty reported receiving an email from Jim that he continues to work compiling the data from Christmas Bird Count 2023 and has nothing to report yet.

New Year's Day 2024 Bird and Birder Show: Patty reported that 38 birders showed up at NQP to celebrate at the event hosted by Shirley Devan.

Next Meeting: Patty announced that the next meeting will be a hybrid one via Zoom and in person and held at Quarterpath Recreation Center. Bryan Watts of the Center for Conservation Biology at William & Mary will present an update on his Bald Eagle studies.

Patty Maloney adjourned the meeting at 8:11pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club
January 20, 2024