

**Williamsburg Bird Club**  
**October 15, 2025**

Hybrid meeting at 6 p.m. Conducted in person at Quarterpath Rec Center, Room 2, and via Zoom  
hosted by Ann Carpenter

**Attendance:** 36 in person; 26 via Zoom

**President's Remarks:** President Nancy Barnhart welcomed everyone present and on Zoom. She reported that after this evening's program, there would be a brief period of announcements about upcoming events and a free raffle. She thanked Babbs Griffin for the refreshments.

**Program:** Patty Maloney introduced our speaker, our club's good friend Dr Dan Cristol, W&M Chancellor Professor of Biology and Director of 1693 Scholars Program. He has taught for 30 years and is best known for his work on avian behavior, migration, ecology, cognition, and effects of pollution. He has authored 100 papers co-authored by 50 undergraduates and written 300 bird articles for the Virginia Gazette. He spoke to us about the first book he's writing: *LIFE BIRD A memoir of Birds, Bird Research, and Birding*.

Dan had started the book 7 years ago but wrote most of it during this year's research sabbatical and it is almost ready for publication. His intention was to write a fun book about personal recollections and 40 years of bird research. He chose an interesting format of alternating amusing short chapters with general appeal, with longer ones about serious avian information.

His prologue started with finding the best pizza in Virginia in Crozet, where he learned to his chagrin, that even leather-jacketed bikers can get excited about birds. In an early chapter, he described his spark bird as being an American Woodcock. He was 4 years old and had been suspended from school for arson for a week for having tossed a book of matches into a pile of dust bunnies under the gym radiator! Bored and looking out the window of his Philadelphia home, he saw a funny-looking bird on the bricks outside. His parents were also excited and his dad started taking him on bird walks. By age 11, Dan's bird knowledge exceeded his dad's! Dan initially had trouble learning in school and couldn't read well until 5<sup>th</sup> grade. But he became known for his interest/expertise about birds, which made him feel good, and cemented his lifelong love of birds.

We all wondered about the chapter titled White Meat and learned that birds like chickens and turkeys, whose breast muscles are used only to power brief bursts of flights have twitch fibers containing low levels of myoglobin, an oxygen-carrying protein that makes the muscles in most other birds' dark.

Another chapter talked about the Whooper Swan that Busch Gardens bought to keep Canada Geese from congregating in the water near roller coasters after a metal piece of camera that a goose hit fell off and hit Fabio's nose during the inauguration of Apollo's Chariot. The incident led to an April Fool's joke that a couple of grad students pulled on Dan! We learned that Dan savors April Fools jokes and he described some pretty good ones.

Even in more pedantic chapters, like the one about research on river pollution, there were entertaining tidbits, like a pair of Catbirds nesting outside a carwash to pick off insects from the windshields, and Dan's curious obsession with all the abandoned dolls he kept finding in those polluted backwaters.

Dan's enjoyable and often touching readings had us spellbound and eager for his book to be published

**Announcements:**

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

- **Saturday, October 18:** Eastern Shore. Meet in the parking lot of the Visitor Center of the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge at 8:30 a.m. Deborah Humphries will be the leader.
- **Saturday, November 15:** Grandview Nature Preserve in Hampton. Folks will meet at 8 am. Nancy Barnhart will be our leader.

**Bird Walks -Scott Hemler**

- **Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup>:** Scott will be leading the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday bird walk at New Quarter Park at 8am.

**Newsletter – The Flyer, VP Mary Ellen Hodges, Editor:** The deadline for submissions of photos, articles, book reviews, etc. for the last issue of 2025 is October 26. A slate of the nominees for 2026 Board Members will be presented. Mary Ellen would like to step down and a search for a replacement continues. Voting will be held at the November meeting.

**Christmas Bird Count – Shirley Devan, Chairperson/Compiler:** Shirley reported that this year's CBC will be held on December 14. There'll be more info in the November newsletter.

**Programs – Patty Maloney, VP Programs:**

- **November 19:** James Abbott, environmental educator at James River Association, will give a presentation about birding in New Zealand.
- **January 21, 2026:** Bobby Clontz will talk about land management for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

**CVWO Hawk Watch:** Nancy reported that they'd recorded 26,500 birds as of the afternoon of this meeting.

**Bassett Trace Trail Bird Walks:** Nancy is giving a monthly bird walk open to the public for Colonial Williamsburg. The next one is tomorrow at 8 am.

**End of Meeting:** A free raffle was held and refreshments enjoyed.

Nancy Barnhart adjourned the meeting at 8:16 pm

Respectfully submitted,  
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club  
October 22, 2025