

**Williamsburg Bird Club**  
**March 18, 2025**

Hybrid Meeting: conducted in person at Quarterpath Rec Center, 202 Quarterpath Rd. Williamsburg, and  
via Zoom hosted by Ann Carpenter, at 6:30 pm

**Attendance:** 38 present and 17 via Zoom

**President's Remarks:** Nancy Barnhart welcomed everyone attending in person and via Zoom. She announced that there would be a brief business meeting followed by refreshments and a free raffle after the presentation.

**Presentation:** Rexanne Bruno, VP Programs, introduced the speaker, Jeff Wright, who will speak about *Birds, Climate Change, Threats, and Citizen Science*. Jeff presented himself as loving being called a 'bird brain' and 'tree hugger.' He describes himself as passionate about protecting habitat and species. He's a certified Master Naturalist and past president of the Northern Neck Chapter. He is active in Friends of the Dragon Run; leads hikes for the Nature Conservancy; and is annually involved in many bird, butterfly, bat, and winter waterbird counts.

Jeff started by focusing on the differences between climate change and threats. Climate change, which has been addressed since the 1950s, is such a huge intimidating problem that it can leave the individual feeling powerless. But climate change is only one threat out of a list of others: habitat loss and degradation, window collisions, cats and invasive species, pesticides and toxins, infrastructure collisions, and plastics. Threats that we can work on locally.

Belted Kingfishers were given as an example of habitat loss. Nationwide Christmas Bird Counts have recorded a 46% drop since the 1960s. One cause is shoreline rocks, (riprap, concrete seawalls), covering the necessary soft, vertical earthen banks kingfishers require to excavate 1-5 ft long tunnels for their nest cavity. VDOT has been responsible for reinforcing some of those banks with rocks.

Our state was used as an example of toxins because it allows the sale of lead bullets which can kill raptors and scavengers. 70-90% of Bald Eagles admitted to Virginia's rescue centers suffer from toxic levels of lead.

Jeff emphasized citizen science being at the heart of keeping track of birds and habitats. It is informing scientists how birds are responding to threats. Records have shown that despite the constant increase in the number of bird counts, the total counts of birds have been steadily declining.

But we birders have political clout! A 2024 Fish and Wildlife Survey showed that 1/3 of American adults are bird watchers and spend an average of \$2,188 per person on bird related items: bird food, cameras, trips, binoculars. In 2025, birders added 4 billion dollars to Virginia's economy...more than hunters and fishermen. This money adds power to our voices when we contact local or state officials about conservation efforts.

We learned about the Virginia Conservation Network, founded in 1969, that is the only statewide network of environmental and conservation organizations to advocate for the protection of Virginia's natural resources with a single coordinated voice. Among other things, they have paid staff that maintains a constant presence at our state capitol tracking environmental bills. Your WBC Board will discuss joining and how we can use this resource at our April Board meeting. But it is clear that one of the best things we can do to help the birds we love is to be more active politically.

Jeff closed by commending our bird club for being exceptionally noteworthy for giving scholarships/grants; our citizen science activities; and conducting birding events. He urged us to be even more vocal politically about conservation efforts, particularly in saving habitat and eliminating toxins.

## **Announcements:**

**New Members:** A couple of people put their hand up in response to Nancy's request regarding new members that were present. One was from Singapore.

**WBC Bird Walks – Scott Hemler:** Scott reported that the upcoming 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday monthly walk at NQP would be held on March 28 at 8am at the park office parking lot.

**WBC Field Trips – George Martin:** The next field trips will be:

**March 21<sup>st</sup>:** Machicomoco State Park with Deborah Humphries as leader

**April 18<sup>th</sup>:** Newport News Park with Jason Strickland as leader.

**The Flyer – Mary Ellen Hodges.** March 27 is the deadline for the April issue of *The Flyer*.

**Programs – Rexanne Bruno:** Rexanne reported that the presentation for our April 15<sup>th</sup> meeting will be the two 2025 Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Grant awardees reporting updates on their research.

**Dues:** Nancy Barnhart reminded the membership that this is the last general reminder for members to pay by the end of this March. It's a small group of unpaid members and she will remind them via email.

**The 3rd Annual Virginia Birding Classic** Nancy invited the members to participate in this free event. Folks form teams from 2 to 6 people and register by April 14. Observations must be made from within public lands owned by federal, state, county, or municipal governments between April 15 – May 15. A day is chosen and species identified over 24 hours are reported to eBird. It's to encourage folks to get out and participate in citizen science.

**National Audubon Society:** Nancy reported that she, Shirley Devan, and Rexanne Bruno are working on community advisory committees to streamline the Christmas Bird Count. This may be a 3- year project. We may be one of the clubs that tests new models.

**Bird Counts – Shirley Devan:** Shirley reported that the annual Spring Bird Count is on Sunday, April 26. This will be our 50<sup>th</sup> Spring Bird Count.

**End of Meeting:** There was a brief discussion of birds seen recently. A free raffle was held and refreshments enjoyed.

Nancy Barnhart adjourned the meeting at 7:41 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Cathy Millar, Secretary of Williamsburg Bird Club  
April 14, 2026