



Program: “Avian Brood Parasites: A Story of the Evolutionary Arms Race Between Brood Parasites and Their Hosts”, January 16, 2020

Submitted by Lisa Frandock, Recording Secretary (edited from the January minutes)

Approximately 35 people attended the January meeting to hear our speaker for the evening, Dr. Lynn Moseley, with a program on “Brood Parasitism—Alternate Nesting Strategy”. This was a fascinating program focusing on female birds that lay eggs in a host nest, leaving them with no nest and no parenting.

Two scenarios:

1. Facultative—some seasons they lay in their own nest and other times they deposit their eggs in a host nest.

Examples: American Cuckoo and Wood Ducks.

2. Obligate—the species never build nests or raise their young. Examples: Brown-headed Cowbird and European Cuckoo. (Over 100 species in this category).

The Brown-headed Cowbird is a nomadic bird associated with livestock. The females may lay over 40 eggs per year and are known to have used over 200 species as hosts. The parasite bird benefits from laying over 40 eggs per year. They also spread their eggs over multiple hosts. They must watch nests to lay at the appropriate time to match the host. They have been known to lay eggs in 41 seconds, so as not to be detected. They can also in some cases match the eggs closely in appearance. Questions arise about how the parasite bird recognizes its species and learns their songs. Male cowbirds are hard-wired to produce their own songs and they will only mate with female cowbirds.

Diana Bowman gave the minigrant report. Four grants were awarded.

1. River Landing bird club (baffles for four nest boxes)
2. Dennis Burnette (create birding/pollinator garden)
3. Adams Farm Preschool (bird feeder and supplies)
4. Melanie Buckingham (birding opportunities for middle and high school students-Piedmont Young Birders)