

The Osprey



April 2004 VOLUME 34, ISSUE 8

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Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

NEW MEXICO, JANUARY 2004

By Tyler Bell

Jane Kostenko and I took a trip to Albuquerque, prompted by an expiring frequent flyer ticket on a particular airline, and cheap internet hotel and rental cars. We flew out of BWI on the morning of January 14 on a direct flight, landing in Albuquerque in the early afternoon. After getting our rental car, we got a quick bite to eat and headed north on I-25, then east on I-40 toward Sandia Crest.

We birded our way up the crest road looking for the reported Northern Pygmy Owls with no luck. We arrived at the Crest House and checked in with the ranger there who said that the patio feeder had recently had a flock of two dozen rosy finches. We waited for almost two hours until a pair of Black Rosy Finches showed up. During this time, altitude sickness started to kick in. Albuquerque has a mean elevation of 5000 ft., whereas the Crest House is at 10,678 ft. This is a big jump in altitude from basically sea level in southern Maryland. Just walking around caused elevated heart rate, and even sitting gave us labored breathing. As dusk approached, we headed back down the mountain toward our hotel. While driving along a very busy road toward the interstate, we spied a lump on a phone line. Quickly, we spun around and parked underneath the bird which turned out to be a Northern Pygmy Owl! This bird looks very similar to a Northern Saw Whet Owl but the facial disc is different and the tail is quite long proportionately.

A night at 5000 feet helped us acclimate for the rest of the trip. The next morning after scarfing down a continental breakfast, we went south to Bosque del Apache NWR. This is somewhat of a birding Mecca in the winter as there are large flocks of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese. At the visitor center, there was a feeder being frequented by a couple dozen Gambel's Quail, Spotted Towhees (split from the Rufous-sided Towhee several years ago) and White-crowned Sparrows. Driving around the refuge we spotted a Say's Phoebe and a couple of Loggerhead Shrikes. As it started to rain, we departed for our next destination.

We arrived at the visitor center of El Mapais National Monument. This is a peculiar area dominated by a lava flow and sandstone cliffs with La Ventana natural bridge being the main attraction for us. While hiking up to the bridge in the snow, Townsend's Solitaires sang and flew back and forth in the pinyon pines. Because of the weather, we had the place pretty much to ourselves until we returned to our car.

Next we drove around the lava flow to see the Bandera Ice Cave, where the year-round temperature is 31 degrees. It didn't feel any different to us since the outdoor temp was already below freezing but it must be quite a change in the

heat of summer. Then we hiked up the nearby cinder cone until the trail ended at an overlook of the caldera. The whole formation is loosely consolidated volcanic cinders about the size of charcoal briquettes. The only sound breaking the silence in the falling snow was Mountain Chickadees, and Pygmy Nuthatches, which look remarkably like Brown-headed Nuthatches. A final stop at the visitor center on I-40 gave us some insight into the road conditions we would be facing the next day.

Early up, we packed the car and our stomachs, and got on the road in early morning rush hour traffic westward toward Chaco Culture National Historic Park. Part of the road into the park is paved but 16 miles are unpaved. Some of this is gravel but a couple of stretches of about a half-mile are clay. Unfortunately, when it rains or snows, this clay becomes a quagmire. Fortunately, our 2-wheel drive car made it through, though there was some almost-sideways driving in a couple of spots. The drive was worth it, and the weather and roads kept visitors away. Chaco Canyon is the site of many Anasazi Indian pueblo ruins. One of these, Pueblo Alto, requires a back-country hiking permit. It is up on the plateau above the main canyon complex and is accessed by hiking up a crack in the rock face where a huge slab has broken away from the main cliff. This is not a place for people who are either afraid of heights or are claustrophobic. Since we are neither, we went up to the top. You can look down onto several of the ruins giving a spectacular view.

There weren't many birds around, mostly Canyon Towhees and Pink-sided and Oregon Juncos and a couple of Sage Thrashers but this place isn't a destination for birding. The Anasazi had a grasp of astronomy that even now boggles the mind. There are places where they have spiral petroglyphs that, during celestial events like the solstices or equinoxes, have a sliver of sun or moonlight cast across their center only on the given day or night. The pueblos are also oriented such that on the equinoxes, the sun rises and sets in a line along their northern side and can be seen through strategically placed openings. The ancient road system, particularly the one that crosses the plateau through Pueblo Alto, stretches off to the north in a dead-straight line that runs true for miles. How they did this is anyone's guess.

On our last day, we headed back to Sandia Crest. There were snow flurries as we drove along I-40 that became a full snow storm as we turned onto the crest road. When we were only about halfway up to the top, the road was covered with about four inches of snow and at the top it was a blizzard. The wind was howling and the wind chill was unbearable. We went over to try and see the feeder and could see rosy finches coming and going but the angle wasn't optimal so we waited in the car until the Crest House opened. Once inside, we were treated to all three feeders

being mobbed by about 50 Black Rosy Finches. We were able to pull two Hepburn's race Gray-crowned Rosy Finches from the mob. Unfortunately, there were no Brown-capped Rosy Finches in the mix. Last winter there were even numbers of Black and Brown-capped with a few Gray-crowned. This winter there were a few Brown-caps in November and none since. Also absent were Cassin's Finches which had been common last winter.

Our last stop, before the airport, was Petroglyph National Monument. There are several units of this park but we only had enough time to visit one: Rinconada Canyon. The canyon is lined on the north with volcanic boulders with about 400 petroglyphs etched into the rocks. Some are easily accessible from the trail. Others are visible with binoculars but are off limits while others must be inaccessible. There are some very interesting glyphs there of various animals, birds, humans and geometric shapes. We had not gone here for birds but Canyon Towhees were abundant and we encountered a flock of about 25 Scaled Quail foraging on a grassy hillside.

Had we more time, it's doubtful that we would have pursued more birds excepting the Juniper Titmouse, which we heard but could not see in the snow storm. However, there is so much of historic significance here that we easily could have spent a week just visiting ruins and pueblos!

One thing that is interesting is that only recently have there been feeders at Sandia Crest. In those few years, Rosy Finches have started to become fairly reliable there. Given enough time, and the proximity to the airport (about an hour drive), it is possible that this may become the Rosy Finch capital of the US.

AUDUBON SOCIETY DONATES BINOCULARS TO SAINT MARY'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 20, Saint James, MD.—This morning the Southern Maryland Audubon Society donated 30 pairs of Audubon® 4 X 30 binoculars to the Elms Environmental Education Center for use by elementary school students. President Ann Wearmouth, and Education Chairperson Mildred Kriemelmeyer distributed the binoculars to eager Ridge Elementary School Third Graders at the beginning of their bird study unit, while a pair of adult Bald Eagles watched the event from a distant tree along the Chesapeake Bay shore.

In November, 2003, Marianne Chapman, Director of the Elms Environmental Education Center for St. Mary's County Public Schools asked officers of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society whether members of the Society might donate their used binoculars to the program, to replace the worn out ones the Center was having difficulty keeping usable. The Board of Directors of the Audubon Society instead decided to establish a special fund to supply new binoculars to school environmental education classes, and made its first donation of 30 binoculars to the Elms program in time for the start of the 2004 spring term. Society officers worked with Elms

Environmental Education Specialist Kurt Reitz to select a suitable design for use by elementary school students.

The Southern Maryland Audubon Society (SMAS), established in 1971, is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, and is the largest citizen group involved in nature study and natural resource conservation issues in the Southern Maryland counties of Calvert, Charles, Saint Mary's, and southern Prince George's. SMAS is a non-profit organization incorporated in Maryland, with educational, scientific, and charitable activities financed through membership dues, donations, and special fundraising programs. To donate to the SMAS fund to give binoculars to school and youth environmental education programs, send donations, payable to Southern Maryland Audubon Society, to: Binocular Fund, Southern Maryland Audubon Society, P. O. Box 181, Bryans Road, MD 20616. Direct inquiries about the fund and other education programs to Education Chair, Mildred Kriemelmeyer, at the above address, or telephone her at 301-372-8766.



Third Grade students from Ridge Elementary School with binoculars donated by SMAS, at the Elms Environmental Education Center. Photo by Kurt Reitz.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR POTOMAC RIVER CLEANUP

It is again time for our Audubon members to come to the aid of our waterways. The annual Potomac River Cleanup will be on Saturday, April 3, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, rain or shine. Southern Maryland Audubon Society is again sponsoring the cleanup at Marshall Hall Park. The site is located at the western end of Maryland Route 227, approximately five miles from Route 210 at Bryans Road.

Every year, when the volunteers were done, there has been a great improvement in the appearance, safety, and usefulness of the shoreline. The waterfront at Marshall Hall has progressively become less littered owing to the cumulative effect of these yearly cleanups. SMAS members and other community volunteers can be proud that this one-day-a-year effort has helped heal the Potomac River.

Volunteers should come dressed for the weather. Gloves, trash bags, drinks, and snacks will be provided. For more information, contact Site Coordinator, Bob Lukinic, at 301-283-6317. Remember April 3, and we hope to see you there.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Kid's Fall Bird Trip, Calvert Marine Museum, November 13, by Bob Boxwell

I'd done the publicity this time (newspapers, flyers, e-mail, web page) but still hadn't heard from many people. So I was not surprised when 9:00 a.m. rolled around and I had no participants. What was embarrassing was I did have a reporter and photographer from the Calvert Recorder to do a story on the trip. After about fifteen minutes (longer than I wait for college professors), the newspaper people left and quite naturally the one family who had called showed up. Even though they were new to the area, they have already gotten into the Southern Maryland spirit of things (can we start anything on time down here?).

Mom, dad, a toddler, and their young daughter were my audience. We wandered around the museum grounds finding cardinals, chickadees, and crows. Vultures and gulls circled overhead as we moved around to the marsh walk. Here our yellow rumps showed themselves, popping in and out of view along the shrubby wax myrtle plants.

We headed inside but decided to forgo the walk through since we didn't have the ten people required for a group rate. Instead we headed to the Discovery Room and climbed up to the bird sanctuary located on the second floor. Having taught many programs here in times past, I felt a bit of *déjà vu*, but it was only a passing reflection.

I made use of the study skins and props I have acquired over the years to teach them about feathers, feet, and beaks. The taxidermy mounts were also incorporated into the program, each with its own bit of information or story.

I always enjoy teaching anybody about birds. But I am not sure if I will continue to do so in this venue. Perhaps it was the word fee that kept people away. Maybe it was the weather (a bit cool, but not that bad). Maybe it's the wrong time of year or possibly the wrong location. I'd really like to do more of these, but in light of poor attendance, I wonder if we should plan any future kid's field trips. Please tell me if I'm wrong.

Great Backyard Bird Count: Myrtle Point and Solomons, February 16, by Bob Boxwell

I was joined by a Girl Scout troop from LaPlata on the morning of President's Day for the Great Backyard Bird Count. Last year's effort at Myrtle Point had been snowed out. This year the wind wasn't cooperative, but we headed out to see what we could find. The trail down to Mill Creek is wide with lots of shrubby stuff for the sparrows to visit. We found several white-throated sparrows and cardinals. Eventually some chickadees joined the group. A bit further down the trail we found a towhee back in the woods puffed up like the head of a dandelion. A special find was a gray catbird hunkered down investigating the root and leaves

under the shrubs. Woodpeckers worked a couple of trees and we identified a downy woodpecker and flicker.

We arrived at Mill Creek but the creek was frozen with very few openings. No birds were in sight except a lone herring-gull flying way out over the creek. We turned around and headed back to the parking lot.

From here I decided to jump the river and check out the waterfowl from Solomons shoreline. Part of the badge the troop was working on was to identify five species by spotting scope. We managed to find mallards, a ring-billed gull, and a herring gull at the launch ramp. We added coots off the boardwalk and finished off the day with a pair of mute swan (one doing a real good imitation of being dead), long-tailed ducks, and a greater black-backed gull.

We parted ways at the end of the island. The girls gave me a box of Girls Scout cookies (opened within minutes) and I had National Audubon pins to distribute. It had been a really nice morning; justifying my lack of plans for the remainder of the day.

Field Trip to Fort Washington Park, Prince George's County, February 21, by Gwen Brewer

A cheery group of about 15 SMAS members set out soon after 8:30 am to look for birds at this 19th century fort, located in a strategic spot on the Potomac River. This National Park has trails and roads that allow you to circle the park and travel along the water, and cover the fort and picnic areas. Habitat includes upland and flooded forested areas, mowed and weedy open areas, and views of the Potomac River, Swan Creek, and Piscataway Creek. It is a good area to check for wintering waterfowl and sparrows, and during fall and spring migration periods. One of our first sightings was an adult Bald Eagle, seen as we gathered in the parking lot (we later saw an immature). Warmed by some of the first hints of spring but buffeted by the wind, we headed to the Lighthouse and located Bufflehead, Common Merganser, and Great Black-backed, Ring-billed, and Herring Gulls on the river. Sparrows (White-throated and Song) were sparse in the weedy open areas, shrubs, and brambles as we headed down the River Trail along the mouth of Piscataway Creek. A flock of Cedar Waxwings, a Northern Flicker, and a passing Killdeer called overhead. It was to be a five woodpecker day, with Downy, Red-bellied, Pileated, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker added during the morning. I had enjoyed the variety and number of waterfowl in this area on the PG County Mid-winter Count about a month prior, but the warm weather had started to disperse the wintering swans and ducks. On this day, only large groups of Canada Geese with a few other waterfowl species were located along the far shore. Squinting through the scope got us some Canvasback, Bufflehead, and Scaup mixed in with the geese. We returned back along the River Trail to the parking area, successfully walking over or around the seriously-tilted boardwalk (compliments of Hurricane Isabel). It reminded me of a carnival fun house! Near the parking lot, we picked up Yellow-rumped Warbler. After fortifying ourselves with some delicious bread (thank

you Cora), we started a loop down the road, and back along the Waterside Trail. One of the highlights of the trip was our close look at several Common Mergansers along the mouth of Swan Creek near the end of the Waterside Trail. This trail also passes through riverine forest, and although the wind made our search more difficult, we eventually added the usual suspects (Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren). Other sightings, including a soaring Red-tailed Hawk, brought our total to about 30 species. A few folks continued up the hill from the parking area to inspect the fort. As we admired the view down the river in the spotting scope, I was reminded that you can't assume that everyone knows about Mount Vernon. One of our new members hails from Canada, where George Washington's home is not a standard topic in school history classes!

AUDUBON DIRECTORS MEET IN ATLANTA, EXTEND CHAPTER SAFETY NET PAYMENTS

Atlanta, Georgia, Sunday, January 25, 2004 – The National Audubon Society Board of Directors gathered here this weekend for their first meeting of the year. This event, the first board meeting chaired by Carol M. Browner, provided a chance for the board to welcome six new directors elected at the December Annual Meeting of members in Erlanger, Kentucky: Lynn Dolnick, Lloyd Semple, Michael Stolper, Ione Werthman, John Whittle, and Steven T. Zimmerman.

Among other tasks, the Board received an update from Bill McQuilkin on the progress of the Ad Hoc Committee on Chapters. As part of that discussion, the Board agreed to extend Chapter "Safety Net" payments for one more year while recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee are being completed and implemented. Before this extension, the chapters were to receive "net dues share" according to the policy adopted in December, 2000. This would amount to some portion of the small part of the dues paid by each National Member that remained after subtracting the expenses National incurs in recruiting and serving these members. Currently this net dues share would be nothing. However, to ease the transition for Chapters from the full \$5.50 per member they had been receiving to the much reduced net dues share, National Audubon Society instituted the Safety Net procedure. Extending the safety net ensures that Southern Maryland Audubon Society will receive a dues share from National of about \$2000 (\$2.75 per National member in the Chapter as of July 2001) for one more year before the full net dues share policy goes into effect.

These new funds will be distributed to state offices, which will then distribute funds to Chapters in their states. This procedure for distributing funds is intended to improve the alignment and integration of Chapter activities and states with state offices: the Chapter Services Office will distribute funds to Chapters in other states. The full Board also had a good discussion about the importance of maintaining and strengthening the partnership between Chapters and the National organization.

FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED

The gift of an osprey adoption becomes part of a special fund for the support of osprey research and raptor conservation projects in Southern Maryland. The foster parent receives:

- 1) A certificate of adoption of an osprey fledgling banded with a numbered U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg band. The certificate gives the location and date the osprey was banded.
- 2) Information on osprey ecology and migration patterns, a 5"x7" photo of a fledgling and information that Steve receives on the whereabouts or fate of the bird.

Interested? Here's how to become an Osprey parent. Send \$10.00, with the form, for each fledgling to be adopted to:

**Southern Maryland Audubon Society
P.O. Box 181
Bryans Road, Maryland 20616**

ADOPT AN OSPREY

Name: _____

Address: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____



You can choose to either adopt an Osprey from

Patuxent River

Potomac River



**WELCOME,
NEW MEMBERS!!**

- Dr. William O. Berry, Waldorf
- Janet Boeshart, Chesapeake Beach
- Mrs. Nadine Chicoine, Leonardtown
- Patricia A. Crawley, Suitland
- Paul-Lesley Dugard, Ft Washington
- Ruth Gilroy, Indian Head
- George Hauswirth Waldorf
- Cindy Heim, Hughesville
- Bob Hicks, Great Mills
- Kimberly Kaeser, Clinton
- Cathy Kennedy, Valley Lee
- Thomas Konrad, St Leonard
- Kevin Marek, Waldorf
- Hazel Maunder, Brandywine
- John McGuire, Owings
- Phyllis Olson, Solomons
- Monty Pugh, Lexington Park
- Mary Ann Schiller, Barstow
- Ralph Smith, Waldorf
- Sherry Tarantino, Lusby
- Gerald Tucker, Lusby
- Linda Vert, St Inigoes
- Richard Walsh, North Beach

April Events continued from back page

April 24—Saturday—7 a.m. and 9 a.m. Field Trip
Greenwell State park and Trent Hall, St. mary's County. Spring Migrants and Shorebirds. Leaders: Bob Boxwell (301-872-5998) and Shirley Wood (301-884-0594). Half day trip. Visit a spring migration banding station at Greenwell State park (7 a.m.) and follow it with a trip to the best shorebird location in St. Mary's County at Trent Hall (9 a.m.). You may come to one or both parts of the morning. To get to Greenwell State Park take Sotterly Road to Steer Horn Neck Road, and turn right. Look for the first gate on the left and park in the grassy area next to it (at the model airplane field). For Trent Hall, meet at the Library in Charlotte Hall to carpool. Please telephone the leaders for details.

May 1—Saturday—All day. Field Trip
Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, and St. Mary's Counties. Birdathon. Sponsor a team or join one in this all-day event to tally as many species as possible within 24 hours. This a great and fun way to raise money for SMAS. Call your county representative for details (see 2003-2004 program brochure for names and phone numbers).

NEW OR RENEWAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

- Please enroll me as a member of the Audubon Family and the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. I will receive the chapter newsletter, *The Osprey*, and all my dues will support environmental efforts in Southern Maryland.
- Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and the local chapter, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society, at the Introductory Offer. I will receive the *Audubon* magazine, the chapter newsletter, *The Osprey*, and support National and local environmental causes.
- Please **renew** my membership in the National Audubon Society and the local chapter, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Mail to: Southern Maryland Society
Attn: Membership
P.O.Box 181
Bryans Road, MD 20616

**Chapter-Only Dues, payable to
Southern Maryland Audubon Society**

- (new/renewal)
- Individual/Family \$20
 - Senior/Student \$15
 - Optional Donation \$ _____

National Dues, payable to National Audubon Society

- Introductory Offer - 1 year \$20
- Introductory Offer – 2 year \$30
- Senior/Student \$15
- Renewal Rate \$35

APRIL EVENTS

April 3—Saturday—8 a.m. Field Trip

Patuxent River Naval Air Station, St. Mary's County. Migrants and Shorebirds. Leader: Doug Lister (301-342-3670). Half day trip. Meet at the Park-N-Ride lot adjacent to the old library on Tulagi Place in Lexington Park. The Patuxent River NAS has a variety of habitats well suited for migrants and shorebirds. Call the leader for reservations before March 20.

April 3—Saturday—9 a.m. to noon. Volunteer Activity

Potomac River Cleanup, Marshall Hall Park, Charles County. Volunteer to clean up the shoreline of the Potomac River. Contact Bob Lukinic at 301-283-6317 for details. (See notice on page 2.)

April 7—Wednesday—7:30 p.m. Monthly Meeting

Clearwater nature Center, Cosca Regional Park, Clinton, Prince George's County.

Rare and Endangered Butterflies of Southern Maryland, by Richard Smith, Washington Area Butterfly Club. Dick Smith has been leading an effort to survey rare butterflies in Maryland for the past two years. In this talk, he will present information on the life histories, habitats, and identifying features of the rare butterflies that have been found recently and historically in southern Maryland.

April 10—Sunday—9 a.m. Field Trip

Flag Ponds Nature Park, Calvert County. Spring Migrants and Wildflowers. Leaders: Sue Noble and Jack Leighty (410-535-5870). Half-day trip. Greet spring by

visiting one of the best wildflower displays in Southern Maryland. The varied habitat here also yields a nice variety of birds. From Rte. 2/4 about 10 mi. south of Prince Frederick, take Flag Pond Parkway to the park entrance. Meet at the visitor center. Entrance fee applies.

April 17—Saturday—8 a.m. Field Trip

Chapman State Park, Mount Aventine, Charles County. Birds and Bluebells. Leader: Carol Ghebelian (301-753-6754). Half day trip. Fields, woods, and marsh on this Potomac River site provide good opportunities to see wintering and spring migrating birds. We will also see a rare stand of glorious Virginia Bluebells. From Rte. 210 between Bryans Road and Indian head take Chapman's Laonding Road to the Mount Aventine gate.

April Events continued on page 5

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The deadline for the Osprey is the fifth of each month. Please send all short articles, reports, unique sightings, conservation updates, calendar items, etc. to the above address.

Southern Maryland Audubon Society
P.O. Box 181 Bryans Road, MD 20616

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