

The Osprey



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www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

IS THERE LIFE AFTER ATLASING?

Welcome to IBA Bird Blitz

By David Curson

Now that fieldwork for the Maryland-DC Breeding Bird Atlas project has come to a close many birders who became hooked on atlasing must be wondering how they might achieve ornithological fulfillment next spring. A new kind of bird count, "Bird Blitz," may hold the answer. Bird Blitz combines a good morning's birding with the fun of putting birds on the map (literally) and also helps bird conservation.

The purpose of Bird Blitz is to provide population data on at-risk bird species in order to determine the most critical places to protect and manage for these vulnerable birds. We call such places Important Bird Areas (see "Important Bird Areas in Maryland and DC" in the May, 2006 issue of *The Osprey*). It is surprising how little we know about population levels of even the highest priority at-risk birds at a given site. Breeding Bird Atlas results simply tell us whether a species is present, and local birders often stop searching for a species after they have seen it that day, or year, depending on their listing timeframe. It is estimates of the sizes of breeding songbird populations that are most lacking from the data available for prospective IBAs. Bird Blitz focuses on these.

The Bird Blitz method provides a minimum population estimate of a species, based on a single visit to a site. This works because we identify Important Bird Areas by determining that the actual population of a particular species exceeds a threshold number given in the IBA criteria for site selection. The method involves walking a route through habitats where at-risk species are likely to be found, and mapping the locations of individuals of these birds on a large scale map. The way it works is this:

1. Birders select a site they know reasonably well that they believe may qualify as an IBA.
2. They compile a list of bird species at risk from Table 2 of the IBA criteria, which breed regularly at the site. These are the primary target species for the survey at this site.
3. They select a section of the site that can be covered in a morning and plan a route that covers as much as possible of the habitats where the primary target species occur.
4. They walk this route in the morning during the breeding season, tally individuals of primary target species on the Bird Blitz survey form, and plot the route walked and the locations of all individuals of these species on a large scale map.

The total of individuals for each primary target species provides the minimum population estimate for the area covered. Most of the birds encountered are likely to be singing males, and it is assumed that that each of these represents a pair. For this assumption to hold true, only breeding birds, and not migrant individuals, can be counted. Therefore, a Bird Blitz should happen within Breeding Bird Atlas safe dates for the primary target species. Totals of each species can then be compared directly with the threshold numbers of breeding pairs listed in Table 2 of the IBA criteria shown as Table 1 on page 2 of the May 2006 issue of *The Osprey*. This method does not yield population estimates accurate enough for tracking trends over time, but the data are useful for evaluating likely IBAs!

Several teams of volunteers field-tested the Bird Blitz method in 2006 in the Patapsco River valley west of Baltimore. During late May and June, 23 volunteers participated in 8 different counts covering almost half of this area and produced totals for nine at-risk species that suggest this forested valley does indeed qualify as an IBA (see Table below).

At-risk species	Grand total, Bird blitz 2006	Threshold breeding pairs (Table 2, IBA criteria)
Whip-poor-will	7	10
Willow Flycatcher	5	20
Wood Thrush	77	160
Blue-winged Warbler	6	15
Prairie Warbler	32	30
Cerulean Warbler	5	10
Worm-eating Warbler	12	20
Louisiana Waterthrush	25	20
Kentucky Warbler	2	30

Bird Blitz is an ideal bird survey method for volunteer "citizen scientists" because it can be done in groups and does not require complex training. A regular club field trip can be adapted to function as a Bird Blitz. There is no need for distance estimates or timed counts – all it requires is that at least one observer in the team can identify all birds at the site by sight and sound, and can read a map well enough to locate their positions and plot them.

Organize your own Bird Blitz in 2007

There are still plenty of sites in southern Maryland that may qualify as an Important Bird Area, but which still lack the right kind of data to fully evaluate this. We hope to identify all remaining IBAs in 2007.

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Why not organize a Bird Blitz this spring at a potential IBA near you? It is not necessary (and often not even possible!) to cover an entire site, but if several teams coordinate on a single day, or if one team covers different sections of the site on different days, a significant proportion of a larger site can be "blitzed". Southern Maryland sites for which Bird Blitz data would be useful include:

- Mattawoman Natural Environment Area/Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area, Charles County.
- Zekiah Swamp, Charles County.
- Forests in southwestern Charles County.
- St. Mary's River State Park, St. Mary's County.
- Forests north of Leonardtown, St. Mary's County.
- Point Lookout, St. Mary's County.
- Calvert Cliffs State Park, Calvert County.
- Flag Ponds, Calvert County.
- Cove Point, Calvert County.
- Fishing Creek, Calvert County.

Bird Blitz instructions and survey forms are available by contacting Audubon MD-DC's Director of Bird Conservation, David Curson, at Audubon MD-DC, 2437 Eastern Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21224, or 410-558 2473. IBA criteria and nomination forms are available at Audubon's website: <http://mddc.audubon.org>. Click on the Science & Conservation button, and then select Important Bird Areas.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Port Tobacco Christmas Count, December 17, 2006 by Gwen Brewer.

More than 20 people ventured out on an unusually warm day for the Christmas count. Our number included 6 first-time participants in this count (Tom Seaton, Joe and Maggie Tieger, Mary Sokol, and Craig and Glenn Turner), and it was great to have them together with our wonderful "regulars"! Through the hard work and good spotting of these folks, we saw 94 species in the count circle this year. Since 1984, this number of species in this count circle was surpassed only by the 95 species in 1988. The total number of individual birds was also high, due to a flock of over 16,000 Common Grackles near Allen's Fresh reported by David Henderson. We had a good variety of waterfowl, 16 species, although in small numbers compared to previous years. We spotted all expected raptors, 7 species, and three owl species (no Barn Owl this year).

Shorebird highlights were Greater Yellowlegs in the Nanjemoy area, by Craig and Glenn Turner, and one American Woodcock in the north section of the count area, by Tom Seaton and Bob Boxwell. We got seven woodpecker species, and we are lucky that Jean Artes has a red-breasted nuthatch at her house, which is in the count circle. Open habitat birds of note were several Northern Harriers, flocks of American Pipits and Horned Larks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and a good showing of sparrows (10 species), including Fox, White-crowned, and a high number of Chipping Sparrows. We tallied a few Wild Turkeys, but no Gray Catbirds or Pine Warblers, despite

the warm weather. Unusual birds for the count this year were House Wren, found by Bob Boxwell and Tom Seaton, and two male Brewer's Blackbirds, found by George Jett and Gwen Brewer. George returned the next day and photographed one male Brewer's Blackbird, a very rare bird in the county and a new species for this Christmas count circle! Thanks very much to all who participated. —Gwen Brewer, Compiler.

Tropical Kingbird in Somerset County, by George Jett.

I photographed this Tropical Kingbird, *Tyrannus melancholicus*, a Maryland first state record, on December 28, 2007 on Reading Ferry Road, near Trinity, Maryland. Trinity is south of Salisbury, in Somerset county. I used a Canon 30D with a Canon 500 f4 lens with a 1.4 converter. I shot from a tripod.

The bird had been recently reported on the listserv MDOsprey. Gwen and I drove to Maryland on Dec. 27 from Flushing, Michigan where we were having Christmas with her family. We had planned on coming home on Wednesday anyway, but when we got home that evening I noticed the kingbird report. Having not spent enough time in the car that week, we decided to try and find the Tropical Kingbird.

What you see is one of several images I got. The bird also called and sang while we were there, which confirms that the bird was not a Couch's Kingbird. The bill is also too large for a Couch's. The species is rarely found in the USA east of extreme southeastern Texas.



To see this image in color, go to this issue of *The Osprey* posted at www.geocities.com/smdaudubon.

SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISER

The gift wrapping fundraiser at the Wild Bird Center raised \$611 for the camp scholarship fund. Thank you, once again, to Lee and Dee Duer, owners of the store, who hosted the event the two weeks before Christmas and provided the wrapping materials. All the store

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personnel welcomed us, especially the store security personnel, Shadow and Heidi, the Duers German shepherds. Thank you to the night owls who kept the wrapping table going during evening hours at the store, George Jett and Ann Wearmouth. Thanks, also, to Bev Walker for daytime wrapping, a welcome break so I could run urgent errands. The amount raised is more than half the amount of a scholarship. Tax deductible donations to the camp scholarship fund are always accepted.

—Millie Kriemelmeyer

TENTH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT TO COMBINE FUN OF BIRD WATCHING WITH CONSERVATION

New York, NY & Ithaca, NY, January 4, 2007 - What mid-winter activity is fun, easy, free, and helps bird conservation? What can parents and teachers do with children that connects them to a whole new world of natural wonders? This February, the tenth annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), sponsored by National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, will give everyone a chance to discover the birds in their neighborhood and "Count for the Record."

During February 16-19, 2007, people of all ages, from beginners to experts, are invited to join this event that spans all of the United States and Canada. Participants can take part wherever they are - at home, in schoolyards, at local parks or wildlife refuges. Observers simply count the highest number of each species they see during an outing or a sitting, and enter their tally on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site at www.birdsource.org/gbbc.

Participants who want to hone their bird watching skills can learn more from the Great Backyard Bird Count web site, which offers identification tips and access to photos, sounds, maps, and natural history information on more than 500 bird species. People can also submit photos to an online gallery showcasing the dazzling array of winter birds found during the GBBC. Competitions add another element of fun, including a photo contest, rankings for most numerous birds, and the coveted "checklist champ" title for towns, states, and provinces with the highest participation.

FEDERAL AGENCY WON'T LIST DISAPPEARING EASTERN SONGBIRD AS 'THREATENED'

Without Federal Protection, Cerulean Warbler Population will Continue to Plummet

Washington, DC, December 7, 2006 – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), after stalling for six years and missing numerous deadlines required under the Endangered Species Act, has issued a decision not to list the Cerulean Warbler as a threatened species. The National Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife, and regional conservation organizations that petitioned the agency in 2000 to list the

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FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED



Southern Maryland Audubon Society sponsors the banding of nestling birds of prey, or raptors, with serially numbered aluminum bands in cooperation with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U. S. Department of the Interior, as part of our bird research and conservation activities in Southern Maryland. Limited numbers of Osprey and Barn Owl nestlings become available each year for adoption. The gift of \$10 for an Osprey adoption, or of \$25 for a Barn Owl adoption, contributes to a special fund for the support of raptor research and raptor conservation projects. The foster parent receives:

- A certificate of adoption with the number of the U. S. Department of the Interior band, and the location and date of the banding.
- Information on the ecology and migration patterns of the species, photo of a fledgling, and any other information on whereabouts or fate of the bird that may be available.

Interested? Here's how to become a foster parent of an Osprey or a Barn Owl. Send \$10.00 for each Osprey, or \$25 for each Barn Owl to:

Southern Maryland Audubon Society
ATTN: Adoption Program
11350 Budds Creek Rd.
Charlotte Hall, Maryland 20622



ADOPT A RAPTOR

Name: _____

Address: _____

I wish to adopt (check one):

_____ (number of) Osprey, \$10.00 each

_____ (number of) Barn Owl, \$25.00 each

Amount Enclosed: _____

(Make checks payable to:

Southern Maryland Audubon Society)

Cerulean as threatened expressed grave concerns over the songbird's future without the comprehensive protections provided by the Act.

The Cerulean Warbler population has dropped almost 82 percent throughout its U.S. range over the last 40 years, making it the fastest declining warbler in the country. The rate of decline has quickened and the threats to its survival, particularly from mountain removal mining, have worsened while the groups' petition has been pending before the FWS.

The FWS decision comes after the groups sued the agency in February 2006 for repeatedly violating deadline requirements under the Act. In June, the FWS settled that case by promising to render a final decision by November 30. The decision was entered into the Federal Register today.

"The birding community is greatly concerned because the Cerulean has been declining throughout its range for such a long period of time," said Greg Butcher, Ph.D., Director of Bird Conservation with Audubon. He said the bird has declined an average of 6 percent per year over the last eight years, compared to an annual average of 4.3 percent from 1966 to 2004.

"It's a tragedy that the Fish and Wildlife Service won't step up and act now, before this songbird moves any closer toward extinction," said DJ Gerken, staff attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization representing the conservation groups.

Since the petition was filed, new information has come to light about the increasing loss and fragmentation of the Cerulean's eastern forest habitat from mountaintop removal mining. This form of surface mining is expected to increase dramatically in the core of the Cerulean's range where the bird has already suffered drastic population declines – 80 percent in the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia, and 65 percent in the Ohio Hills in Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

A multi-agency environmental study of mountaintop mining in four states (WV, TN, KY, VA) found that between 1992 and 2012, some 1.4 million acres of forests will be lost, more than half due to mountaintop mining. The study noted that this loss of habitat for forest birds with core breeding areas in the Appalachian coal fields has "extreme ecological significance in that habitats required by these species for successful breeding are limited in the eastern United States." The Partners in Flight program has identified 15 songbirds with habitat in these forests as priority species for conservation, with the Cerulean as the highest priority. Ceruleans will be the most affected because they favor the steep slopes and ridge tops targeted by mountaintop removal. More than 70 percent of breeding Cerulean Warblers are found in the Ohio Hills and Cumberland Plateau regions targeted by mountaintop mining.

In 2000, 28 groups throughout the East petitioned the FWS to list the Cerulean as threatened, citing the precipitous decline in population and the growing threats to its summer breeding habitat in higher-elevation deciduous forests, including logging, sprawl development and mountaintop removal mining. FWS biologists at one time considered

the bird a 'candidate species,' and found in 2002 that the groups' petition warranted further study. However, the agency, which has continually come under fire for ignoring its own scientists' analysis in favor of politically expedient decisions, evaded issuing a final determination until forced by the court.

"The FWS decision not to list the Cerulean Warbler is just one more example of the administration's blatant disregard for science," said Caroline Kennedy, senior director of field conservation with Defenders of Wildlife. "Any delay in taking the steps necessary to protect the warbler and its habitat only propel the songbird closer to extinction."

"The Southern Appalachians form the southernmost range for the Cerulean, one of the songbirds most cherished by the growing number of birders who come to the mountains of western North Carolina," said Bob Gale, Ecologist for the Western North Carolina Alliance. "The federal government is shirking its responsibility to do everything possible to keep this bird from disappearing from our mountains altogether."

The conservation groups said they will continue their efforts to protect the Cerulean Warbler, including a possible legal challenge to the agency decision, continued tracking and documentation of the bird's population, advocating improved logging practices that do the least damage to Cerulean habitat, and seeking habitat protection on national forest lands.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Phillip/Claudia Angle, Nanjemoy
Rosebud Archer, White Plains
Franklin Ampy, Suitland
Barbara Bechtel, Piney Point
Marilyn Beeson, Dunkirk
Katherine Bell, Suitland
Kathlyn Brigham, California
James Briscoe IV, Saint Leonard
Phyllis C. Burke, Port Republic
Phyllis Burkes, Port Republic
Rafael Curbelo, Waldorf
Nancy Deady, Lusby
Patricia Durkin, Washington, DC
Kermit Dyke, Lusby
Paul Eastwood, Chesapeake Beach
Harvey Gagne, La Plata
Larry Haskett, St. Mary's City
Benjamin Johnson, Callaway
Wayne Johnson, Great Mills
Kathy Luers, White Plains
Stephen Milback, Callaway
Wendy Mitchell, Prince Frederick
Chris Ordiway, Accokeek
Jean Perkins, Owings
Linda Reid, Fort Washington
Alma Roussel, Avenue
Barbara Sapienza, Leonardtown
Rebecca Turner, La Plata
Matthew Wasinchism, Leonardtown
Glenna Wood, Mechanicsville

FEBRUARY EVENTS

February 7—**Wednesday**—7:30 PM. **Monthly Meeting**
La Plata United Methodist Church, Corner of Rte. 6 and Rte. 301, La Plata, Charles County. **Oysters of the Chesapeake** by Eric Johnson, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. The American Oyster has been an integral component of the Bay's ecosystem since before human settlement. Learn about the reef communities at the bottom of the Bay and how their decline impacts other Bay resources—environmental as well as economic. There will be discussion on the consequences (pro and con) of introducing a non-native oyster. Our speaker is a researcher with the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center where the main Anne Arundel campus uses the Rhode River sub-estuary and its 14 square-mile watershed as a representative model system for the enormous 64,000 square-mile Chesapeake drainage basin.

February 10—**Saturday**—8 AM to 2 PM. **Field Trip**
St. Mary's County Winter Chase. **Various Winter Hotspots.** Leader: Tyler Bell (301-862-4623, belljt@si.edu). A two-thirds day search for winter specialties in a very productive area. Expect stops at Beauvue, St. George's Island, Point Lookout, and other hotspots. Meet at the Wildewood Shopping Center, Rte. 235, in front of Paintin' Place on the left. Directions: From intersection of Rtes. 4 and 235, proceed on Rte. 235 toward Charlotte Hall to the next traffic light. Turn left, then immediately right into the shopping center. From Charlotte Hall on Rte. 235, turn right at the light past the Outback Steak House, then right again. Be prepared for cold and

dress warmly. Bring spotting scopes if you have them. Facilities along the way, no fee except at Point Lookout.

February 16-19—**Friday through Monday**—all day. **Special Event** Calvert, Charles, Prince Georges, and St. Mary's Counties. **Great Backyard Bird Count.** People of all ages, from beginners to experts, are invited to join this tenth annual event spanning the United States and Canada. Contribute your bird counts to the database to help bird conservation. Go to www.birdsource.org/gbbc for details, information, and rules. (See article on page 3)

February 28—**Wednesday**—7:00 to 9:00 PM. **Board of Directors Meeting** Charles County Library, La Plata. Directors meetings are open to any member.

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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.

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