

The Osprey

February 2008 VOLUME 38, ISSUE 5



www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

SMAS DONATES BINOCULARS TO TWO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

In November, 2007, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society donated 20 binoculars to The Accokeek Environmental Studies Center at the Hard Bargain Farm in Accokeek, Prince Georges County, and 35 binoculars to the Elms Environmental Education Center in St. Mary's County. These binoculars, provided through the Southern Maryland Audubon Society's Binocular Donation Fund, let children view wildlife much better than with the naked eye alone. As a result of the donation, Bob Boxwell provides the following example of how these instruments are used at the Elms Environmental Education Center:

I was invited to do a program on birds for a third grade class, one part of which would be using the new binoculars donated by Southern Maryland Audubon Society. This was part of the SMAS tribute to a recently deceased friend and SMAS member, John Horton. John was a friend of mine as well and I was happy to accept.

December 11 was gray and slightly damp. The birds were out and about but the background for viewing wasn't the best. We started off in the classroom learning something about the local birds and activities, through the use of a set of study skins. I've been fortunate to have available a number of skins on loan from St. Mary's College of Maryland in St. Mary's City. The variety of lessons that can be taught using these skins, feathers, and other materials is amazing. They have easily gone to dozens of venues and to over one hundred programs.

I brought along specimens of White-throated Sparrow and a Dark-eyed Junco, using them to point out various field marks. We talked about mockingbirds and thrashers, Blue Jays, and hawks. One boy correctly identified a male and female Northern Cardinal. A girl told me the female was drab because she wanted to protect her eggs. Nice class with good manners and questions.

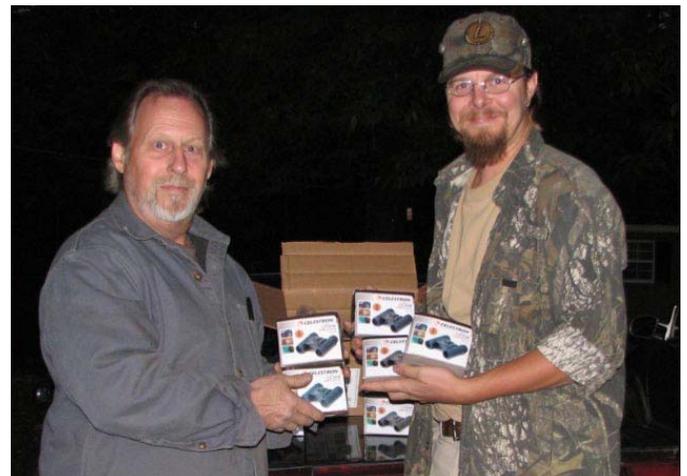
We headed out into the field with all twenty-one children wearing a set of fully functional binoculars. There were even enough that all the adult chaperones each had a pair to use. The group walked over to the marsh platform where everybody got a chance to adjust their binoculars as we scanned the water. A couple of the

children spooked a Great Blue Heron at the next open spot. We also spotted three small waterfowl against the far shore at this point.

We heard Carolina Chickadees and a Downy Woodpecker as we walked along the rest of the trail. Pausing occasionally to listen and look at various hollow trees. The best stop of the day was at the bird feeder. This was a small platform feeder off a trail near some underbrush and a small tree. We watched as less than ten feet in front of us Red-breasted Nuthatches flew in taking a seed and displacing the previous Nuthatch or maybe a chickadee. The chickadee was back and forth so regularly I was able to whisper his movements in advance of their happening. A Tufted Titmouse came by briefly as well.

We finished with a walk by the ponds and to the beach. No action in the eagle's nest, but the children had fun finding a shell, stone, beach glass, or other treasure to take home. It was fun, it was educational, and SMAS helped make it happen. In discussion with the staff I expressed my hope that SMAS can build on this partnership and continue to provide our schools with the help they need with environmental education.

Binocular donation is an ongoing program of this local chapter of the National Audubon Society to assist educators in our area with needed binoculars. Send tax-deductible donations to Southern Maryland Audubon Society, Binocular Fund, P. O. Box 181, Bryans Road, MD 20616.



Chris Ordiway (right), naturalist at the Hard Bargain Farm in Accokeek, receives 20 binoculars from Bob Lukinic of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. Photo by Bob Lukinic.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Calliope Hummingbird in Calvert County, by George Jett

On Sunday evening, October 21 I got a call from Jim Stasz. He informed me he had a Calliope Hummingbird at his feeder in North Beach. He wanted to know if I would come over and get some still photographs. He had taken some video. This being the third record of Calliope Hummingbird for Maryland, I asked him if a bear poops in the woods.

Monday morning, October 22 around 8 AM I called to confirm the bird had spend the night in North Beach. Jim said yes and I headed up the road. Jim's feeder is on the west side of his house, and I did not want to get there too early since the light would not be on the feeder. Besides the hummingbird had been there before first light, so it was just a matter of waiting ... I hoped.

I arrived around 9 AM and the feeder was still in the shadow of Jim's house. After an anxious fifteen minutes wait the Calliope Hummingbird arrived to feed. I took a few images but morning light was not available yet, so the images were less then satisfactory.

After feeding the bird would fly up toward a tree north of Jim's yard, and perched some where. This tree was in the morning light, and just over the property line, so I was hopeful I could get better and more natural images in the tree. Around 11 AM after several unsuccessful attempts to locate the bird in the tree my luck changed. Below is an image of the bird.

(*Editors note:* The Calliope Hummingbird normally breeds in the mountains of the far west, from British Columbia and western Alberta to northern Baja California. It winters in southern Mexico, and casually along the gulf coast of the USA.)



Calliope Hummingbird, *Stellula calliope*, in North Beach, MD on October 22, 2007. Photo by George Jett. (To see this photo in color, go to this issue of *The Osprey* at www.geocities.com/smdaudubon.)

St. Mary's Waterfowl trip, 3 November 2007, by Tyler Bell

Hurricane Noel was about 150 miles east of Ocean City as 8 of us met at the Wildewood Shopping center. Due to its proximity, the winds were coming from the north at about 25 – 30 mph. When we got to the Patuxent River at the Town Creek Pier, the wind was directly in our faces and having not become acclimated to fall temperatures, we were downright cold. Of course, if you had been on my St. Mary's chase trip earlier this year with winds not too far below Noel's, but with temps starting at 15 F, it would have felt downright balmy. Unfortunately, there were few water birds to be seen. A couple of Double-crested Cormorants on the river and several gull species sitting on the sand spit at Point Patience. There were two cooperative gulls that landed nearby on the pier, one Laughing Gull and an adult Ring-billed Gull.

Beauvue Ponds, off of Breton Beach Rd., was less punishing. This is probably the best waterfowl spot in St Mary's county and it didn't fail us. First, there was an American Kestrel that flew up and landed on the power line in the middle of a flock of Mourning Doves. Then, we had to slog our cars through a flock of about 75 Brown-headed Cowbirds that were sitting on Abell's Wharf Rd. Very unusual. One participant hadn't seen many meadowlarks before. Well, they were everywhere. We must have seen over a dozen and some were singing. So, we set up scopes and started scanning the ponds for ducks. The obvious ones were the two Mute Swans. There were Canada Geese in one of the far ponds, American Coots and Pied-billed Grebes at the far side of the near pond, Lesser Scaup, Gadwall, Ring-necked Ducks, American Wigeons, and Ruddy Ducks in the near pond. There were also a couple of Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons.

Raptors seemed to be shrugging off the winds and were seen well at all of our stops. Bald Eagles became the joke of the day as we saw at least 8 of them. In fact, a juvenile was spooking the ducks at Beauvue often enough to be a nuisance for all involved! There was a Red-shouldered Hawk perched near one of the ponds and a Cooper's Hawk flew low overhead then pulled a vanishing act. One second it was directly overhead then the next, nothing but empty sky. Just before we left Beauvue there was a distant soaring Osprey. Along Camp Brown Rd. we saw a pair of Red-tailed Hawks as well as a distant Sharp-shinned Hawk. And along Long Neck Rd., along with a flock of American Pipits and a yellow Palm Warbler, there was a soaring Northern Harrier as well as more of the ubiquitous Bald Eagles.

So, despite the wind and the clouds, which dissipated shortly after we adjourned, we ended up with a respectable 63 species. Thanks to all for coming!

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**December 8, Calvert County Bird Chase,
by Sue Hamilton**

Three intrepid birders joined Dr. Dave Curson and Sue Hamilton for a Calvert County bird chase, in spite of the weathermen's predictions of cold rain.

The group started out at the tip of Lloyd Bowen Road, where several water birds were visible, including Long-tailed Ducks and Bufflehead. A few hundred yards east, several Brown-headed Nuthatches were feeding in the pines. (This is one of the few places in Calvert where they may still be found.)

At Flag Ponds, a trip to the beach provided views of an offshore Common Loon and on shore Killdeer. Highlights of a hike to Duncan's Pond included a flyby Northern Harrier and a cooperative Winter Wren.

Winding up at Battle Creek Nature center, everyone enjoyed watching Red-breasted Nuthatches feeding at a feeding station, from the comfort of the indoor viewing window.

**GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT IS GREAT
OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH
NATURE**

**In February, volunteers throughout the U.S. and
Canada are invited to
"Count for Fun, Count for the Future!"**

New York, NY & Ithaca, NY, 23 October 2007—Millions of novice and accomplished bird watchers can make their fascination with nature add up for science and for the future during the 11th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, led by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. During "Presidents' Day" weekend, February 15–18, 2008, anyone can count birds from wherever they are and enter their tallies online at www.birdcount.org. These reports create an exciting real-time picture of where the birds are across the continent and contribute valuable information for science and conservation.

"These volunteers are counting not only for fun but for the future," said Tom Bancroft, Chief Science Officer for Audubon. "It's fun to see how many different kinds of birds can be seen and counted right in your backyard or neighborhood park. Each tally helps us learn more about how our North American birds are doing, and what that says about the health and the future of our environment."

"The GBBC is a great way to engage friends, family, and children in observing nature in their own backyard, where they will discover that the outdoors is full of color, behavior, flight, sounds, and mystery," said Janis Dickinson, Director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

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**SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS
ACCEPTED NOW**

Scholarship applications are being accepted from teachers, naturalists, and environmental educators who work in the SMAS service area of Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and southern Prince George's Counties.

The scholarship will pay registration and tuition for the Maine Audubon Workshop for Educators held at the Hog Island Audubon Center off the seacoast in Muscongus Bay. The funds may be applied to another workshop, such as Field Ornithology or Audubon Leadership Week.

Dates for the camps are:

Field Ornithology, June 22-28
Workshop for Educators, July 13-19
Audubon Leadership Week, August 10-16

Information on the camps is available at the Maine Audubon website: www.maineaudubon.org.

To apply:

- Write a one-page letter that requests the scholarship and describes your job and how you will use the knowledge and experience gained at the camp to improve and supplement your teaching, as well as enhance your experience and enjoyment in the outdoor, natural world.
- Have your immediate supervisor send a letter of recommendation.

Deadline for receipt of applications is
Tuesday, March 25, 2008

Send application and letters of reference to:
Millie Kriemelmeyer, SMAS Education Chair,
16900 Mattawoman Lane, Waldorf, MD 20601-3801
Phone: 301-372-8766
Fax: 301-782-7615
Email: milliek@radix.net

(Correction—The yard sale article in the December-January issue did not mention Lesley Julian as a volunteer on the day of the annual SMAS yard sale. Lesley moved to Colorado a few years ago but has remained a Chapter-Only member in SMAS. This fall she came "back east" to visit friends and relatives and made a special trip to Southern Maryland to help with the yard sale. SMAS truly appreciates Lesley's continued support!)

People of all ages and experience levels are invited to take part wherever they are—at home, in schoolyards, at local parks or wildlife refuges, even counting birds on a balcony. Observers count the highest number of each species they see during at least 15 minutes on one or more of the count days. Then they enter their tallies on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site www.birdcount.org.

The web site provides helpful hints for identifying birds. Participants can compare results from their town or region with others, as checklists pour in from throughout the U.S. and Canada. They can also view bird photos taken by participants during the count and send in their own digital images for the online photo gallery and contest.

In 2007, Great Backyard Bird Count participants made history, breaking records for the number of birds reported, and the number of checklists. Participants sent in 81,203 checklists tallying 11,082,387 birds of 613 species.

"Literally, there has never been a more detailed snapshot of a continental bird-distribution profile in history," said John Fitzpatrick, Director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Imagine scientists 250 years from now being able to compare these data with their own!"

Already, the count results show how the numbers of some birds species have changed in recent years, such as a decline in Northern Pintails and an increase in Hooded Mergansers, consistent with trends from the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey.

For more information on how to participate, including identification tips, photos, bird sounds, maps, and information on over 500 bird species, visit www.birdcount.org.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is sponsored in part by Wild Birds Unlimited.



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)

FEBRUARY EVENTS

February 2—**Saturday**—8AM to 2 PM. **Field Trip**
Charles County, Winter Shadow Chase. **Groundhog Day
Birding.** Leaders: Gwen Brewer and George Jett, 301-
752-9240, gmjett@comcast.net. We will search for winter
birds and shadows in open water and fields, so dress for
the weather and the sun. Bring spotting scope, food, and
drink. Meet in new Safeway Shopping Center near the gas
station in La Plata, off Rte. 301 north. Carpooling
recommended. Limit 12—reservations required. No fee,
facilities along the way.

February 6—**Wednesday**—7:30 PM. **Monthly Meeting.**
La Plata United Methodist Church, corner of Rtes. 6 and
301 in La Plata, Charles County. **Rails and Rice** by Greg
Kearns, Naturalist, Patuxent River Park. Greg Kearns will
share his knowledge of Sora and other rails, and of the
efforts to restore wild rice, a critically important food source
for rails and other water birds on the Patuxent River. Mr.
Kearns, a MNCPPC naturalist for 25 years at Patuxent River
Park, is a renowned authority on the Sora Rail and wetland
ecology, and is an accomplished photographer and expert
birder. Since 1987, he and colleagues have banded more
than 1400 Sora Rails, and fitted dozens with radio
transmitters. Greg Describes how far and to where Sora
Rails migrate, how fast they fly, and what caused their

significant decline. He will discuss the major wild rice
restoration effort on the Patuxent, along with efforts to control
resident Canada Geese. The geese each grazed 1-2 pounds
of wild rice per day, and their population increased 15% a
year during the 1990s. With successful re-plantings and
goose control, will numbers of Sora and other rails increase?

February 15-18—**Friday through Monday**—Any time.
**Special Event, The Eleventh Annual Great Backyard
Bird Count.**

This mid-winter activity is fun, easy, free, and helps bird
conservation. People of all ages and all levels of experience
are invited to join this event sponsored by the National
Audubon Society and the Cornell University Laboratory of
Ornithology. For information and rules of the count visit
www.birdsource.org/gbbc.

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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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