

The Osprey



JANUARY 2004 VOLUME 34, ISSUE 5

www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

A WINTER REMINDER

by Tina Dew

Don't forget the birdbath heaters, extra seeds, and suet this winter! Last winter, our birds especially appreciated the suet. We fed seven cases (that's 84 cakes!) in an assortment of feeders. We had the typical holder hung on a big oak tree that woodpeckers, nuthatches, and Brown Creepers fed from. We also crumbled suet into pea-sized pieces and put it in a bluebird feeder, in an open holder attached to a hopper-style feeder, and in a big covered cage. The cage feeder was covered with a plywood top and surrounded with 2-inch chicken wire sides to keep out squirrels and our peafowl, while letting small birds in and out.

The grand cage and feeders were used by several hermit Thrushes, almost a dozen Eastern Bluebirds, a half-dozen Carolina Wrens, and dozens of Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, Dark-eyed Juncos, etc. These birds appeared to enjoy the small chunks of suet from dawn to dusk, and I believe it helped many survive the extra-cold winter. We also added sunflower kernels (hulled sunflower seed) to the cage and bluebird feeder, but suet was the most popular food. Many species that were not able to break up the big suet cakes could easily eat the crumbled suet.

We were rewarded with the enjoyment of seeing the birds feed no matter how cold or snowy the weather was. Our pair of bluebirds subsequently nested twice last summer, fledging four babies each time. Our Carolina Wren pair set a record with four successful broods! We also had two pairs of titmice, four chickadee couples, and one box with Great Crested Flycatchers. Taking better care of your winter birds appears to pay off year round!

BIRD TALK, LITERALLY

by Ernest Willoughby

Dr. Jordan Price's program at our November Monthly Meeting, which illustrated the distinctive call dialects unique to each extended family group of Stripe-backed Wrens (*Campylorhynchus nuchalis*) of Venezuela, and how these appear to allow birds to discriminate members of their own family group from members of other families, got me reflecting about the complexity of bird vocal communication. One of the most appealing traits of birds is their voices, from the interesting, often melodious advertising songs of breeding males to the varied calls produced by individuals

in various social settings. For example, in addition to the familiar crowing of the cock, domestic chickens (*Gallus gallus*) have a repertoire of about a dozen distinctive clucks, peeps, squawks, screams, etc. Anyone who has spent time near a hen yard is acquainted with this "vocabulary." Ornithologists and animal behaviorists are learning how birds' varied calls and songs communicate important information about themselves and about their surroundings to their social companions.

I am reminded of the time when I was 12 years of age, and just had to have a Canary (*Serinus canarius*) of my own. My mother and I located a Canary breeder in town not far from our house, and we paid her a visit. In the formal dining room was a large aviary full of young birds, and nearby was a smaller cage with an old male "tutor," whose especially fine song the young males were expected to learn and imitate. For centuries it has been known that to produce consistently fine Canary songsters you have to provide a tutor, a sort of singing master, whose song style and phrasing the young canaries will imitate. As only the males are fine singers, we had to wait to see which of the youngsters began to sing as he approached maturity. Finally we identified a likely prospect, and I handed over the \$15 price, which to me was a vast sum (rent on a house was about \$40 a month then). This I had managed to save from working in the recent potato harvest filling 50 lb. burlap bags with potatoes for about three cents a bag. I named the bird Henry, in honor of the famous operatic tenor Enrico (Henry) Caruso. Henry lived and sang in our house for six years before falling ill and dying. I often propped the door of his cage open, and he would fly around the room. He always went straight back to his cage when he felt threatened, or became tired. Besides his vigorous, trilling and chirping song, he had a variety of other calls that let us know what his various moods were at any instant.

It has since been discovered that many species of songbirds, parrots, and a few hummingbirds must learn their songs or some of their calls by imitation. Ornithologists have known for a long time that some songbirds, such as the Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) of Europe, and the White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) of North America have regional "song dialects" that are distinctive enough that an experienced ornithologist can precisely identify the location where an outdoor film scene was shot by listening to the bird songs in the background. It is the learning and imitating

of the songs the young birds hear their elders making as they are growing up that underlies this phenomenon of regional song dialects. Just how important this learning and imitating may be was first documented in the 1950s by W. H. Thorpe, who hand-raised nestling chaffinches individually in soundproof booths and found that when they matured and began to sing, their songs were unusually simple and strange, as if they knew the right pitch, the right number of notes to make, and the right duration of the song, but could not form the sounds into the complex and pleasing phrases typical of a normal song. On the other hand, young birds raised in isolation, but allowed to hear the recorded songs of a normal adult male while they were fledglings, eventually sang the normal song they had heard played to them. In other words, these birds, and those of many other species hear the songs of their elders while they are growing up, and later, when they begin to sing, they form their own song in imitation of what they had heard months earlier when they were yet too young to sing.

The various call notes are a different story. Nearly all bird species have repertoires of 10 to 20 distinct calls, which signal fear, terror, anger, dominance, submission, anxiety, hunger, food/feeding, comfort, danger on the ground, danger in the air, location, contact, etc. These calls, like the crying, screaming, cooing, and laughing of a young human infant, are not learned by imitation, but seem to be expressed spontaneously when the bird feels various emotional states or perceives specific external stimuli. These sounds can often be shown to cause specific appropriate responses in flock mates. When a hen gives the call signaling she sees a ground predator such as a dog ("buck-buck-bukaaw!"), the others become alert and get quickly off the ground, but if she sees a hawk fly over she gives a harsh scream, and the rest of the flock run and hide under the bushes. The "pishing" we birders make to lure little birds into view resembles their predator warning calls closely enough that they often make an effort to see where the danger is, thus moving momentarily into view so we can identify them. Alternatively, kissing the back of the hand to imitate the scream of a bird in distress can have the same effect, especially if young fledglings are about. Anxious parents will pop into view and begin to scold the potential predator, apparently as an attempt to distract it from their precious offspring.

The more I study birds, the more amazed I am at the complexity of their behavior, and the apparent intelligence they display. Like us, birds are highly social creatures that communicate with body language and voice. That is surely partly why we so like to watch them.

SMAS TO DONATE BINOCULARS FOR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES DIRECTORS APPEAL FOR MEMBER DONATIONS

On November 19, the Board of Directors decided to establish a special fund to provide binoculars for school environmental education classes, including elementary grades. This resulted from a request to SMAS by the Elms Environmental Education Center, St. Mary's County Public Schools, to donate binoculars to replace the decrepit units they had been using for many years. The Directors decided to give The Elms 30 of the Audubon® 4 X 30, suitable for use by children in third grade and up, to be paid for with funds advanced from our reserves.

To cover this expense, and to create a Binocular Fund to allow future donations to environmental education programs throughout our area, the Directors ask SMAS members to donate what they can for this fund. A donation of \$25 would cover the cost of good quality binoculars of a type suitable for children of elementary school age and up. A donation of any amount will be greatly appreciated, and is tax deductible.

Please make drafts payable to Southern Maryland Audubon Society, include a note "for Binocular Fund," or use the clip-and-mail form below, and send to P. O. Box 181, Bryans Road, MD 20616.

	
DONATION FOR BINOCULAR FUND	
Name: _____ Amount donated \$ _____	
Your address: _____	
Mail to: Southern Maryland Audubon Society, P.O. Box 181, Bryans Road, Maryland 20616	

WATERBIRDS ON THE PATUXENT ESTUARY IN WINTER

by Bob Boxwell

As a precursor to the sixth annual Patuxent Waterbird Count, Chris Swarth, director of Jug Bay Wetland Sanctuary (and originator of the count) will present findings from the previous five years. Cosponsored by Southern Maryland Audubon Society and Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust, this program is presented free of charge on Saturday January 24, 2004 starting at 2:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the Calvert Marine Museum.

February 7 marks the sixth annual Patuxent Waterbird Count. This effort is a snapshot of the winter waterbird population along the length of the Patuxent River, running from its headwaters in Carol County all the way downriver to Solomons Island where it greets the Bay. There are some 150 census points along the Patuxent, which is the longest river entirely within the state of Maryland. Join us in finding out where the birds are and what changes we are seeing in the population of waterfowl, gulls, birds of prey, and other avian species that use the Patuxent.

For more information about the program you may contact Bob Boxwell at 410-414-3311 or by e-mail at BobBoxwell@hotmail.com. If you are interested in helping with the count itself, contact Chris Swarth at 410-741-9330 or by e-mail at JugBay@toad.net.

2004 STREAM WADERS PROGRAM, VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Stream Waders is a volunteer stream sampling component of the Maryland Biological Stream Survey (MBSS). The goal of the Stream Waders project is to fill information gaps that still exist concerning the quality of Maryland's streams. Volunteers sample in the same watersheds across Maryland as those sampled by MBSS biologists. Thus, volunteer data will fit seamlessly into results from the MBSS. In the first four years, more than 600 volunteers sampled about 2,100 sites! Data from 2003 will be ready by next February. In the southern Maryland area, the 2004 program will be the last year of the Stream Waders Program. This will cover the Lower Patuxent River watershed, the Wicomico River watershed (not including the Zekiah Swamp watershed) and the small streams flowing directly into the tidal Lower Potomac

See the web link below for a map of next year's watersheds (under "What's new"). To learn more about the Program or to search Stream Waders data from 2000 - 2002, check out DNR's web site at http://www.dnr.state.md.us/streams/mbss/mbss_volun.html.

Volunteers are needed. No experience in stream sampling is necessary. MBSS biologists will train volunteers to collect benthic macroinvertebrates, to assess stream habitat, and to work safely. Volunteers receive maps and sampling equipment. Sampling will take one or two days in addition to the one-day training session. Volunteers can collect data any time during the months of March and April. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff will process the samples, and identify the invertebrates in DNR's lab.

The training session for the southern Maryland area will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Saturday, Feb 7 at Calverton School, Calvert County (near Huntington). To register for the training session, call the Stream Waders

hotline at (410) 260-8623 (toll free in Maryland: 877-620-8367; dial option 9 for voice mail system; then X8623) or email DNR at streamwaders@dnr.state.md.us. Please register by February 1, 2004.

AUDUBON CAMPS OFFER GREAT ESCAPES FOR 2004

New York, NY, Wednesday, December 10, 2003—The National Audubon Society today opened registration for its annual summertime nature camps and Workshops for adults, youth, families, and educators. Camps in Maine, Minnesota, Vermont, and Wisconsin offer weeklong sessions of outdoor adventure from June to September. All programs are specially designed to reflect local landscape and culture that provides campers with a better understanding and appreciation of nature. Online information and registration is available at www.audubon.org/educate/cw/ <<http://www.audubon.org/education/cw/>>.

Each year SMAS provides scholarships for local educators to attend these camps. Teachers, camp nature counselors, and nature center educators are encouraged to apply. Contact Education chair, Mildred Kriemelmeyer, tel. 301-372-8766, email milliek@radix.net, for more information about the program and how to apply.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Richard Briell, Lexington Park
Carol Donohue, Accokeek
Jim Dyson, Bryans Road
Franos Family, Waldorf
Connie McClanahan, La Plata
Patricia Reinhart, Solomons
Jay Fredge, Prince Frederick



REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Point Lookout, No Make That Myrtle Point Field Trip
by Bob Boxwell

Another Saturday, another field trip, October 4, but this time I knew the original location wouldn't work. Point Lookout suffered some major damage during the storm and our new location was Myrtle Point. Again there were four of us on the trip and this time the birds really weren't evident.

We started in the parking lot with a repeated call, which was familiar but not registering, but it responded to my pishing and turned out to be a Brown Thrasher that rewarded us with good views. Not much else cooperated. Cardinals, chickadees, and wrens called and scolded. A mob of crows was working over some poor bird of prey (perhaps the red-shoulder we heard earlier) when Matt spotted a Bald Eagle fairly high up. A minute or so later Warren found a sharpie overhead. I managed to get a nice view as she flew by, including a good look at the nicely squared tail.

With the aerial show over we headed off onto the Deep Woods Trail. The damage back here was not great, with leaves and branches but very few large trees down. We finally ran into a spot of activity with a mixed feeding flock. Once again there was nothing to brag about, mostly cardinals and chickadees. We continued on to the next leg of the perimeter trail, turning onto Kingfisher Trail. And as luck would have it, we found the namesake flying across Kingfisher Pond. A Solitary Sandpiper occupied the beach that separates the pond from the river.

We tried to continue the perimeter by taking the Wet Socks Trail, but finally turned back when a combination a downed trees, greenbrier, and water made the trail untenable. So we headed back to the cars and did our tally. We came up with 26 species and added another (Rock Dove) as we lingered talking afterwards.

After the trip a group of students from St. Mary's College joined me for a beach cleanup. Although the emphasis was on the many bags of recyclables and trash we collected, I managed to add a couple more species including a Great Egret. Not a bad day at all. Nearly 30 species on a less than auspicious morning, met a group of nice young people, who fed me lunch. Who says volunteering is a thankless job anyway?

Camp Merrick, October 18, by Jean Artes

Thank God, rain did not plague our trip to this wonderful new site! (Four rainy trips to Smallwood; I'm beginning to get a little paranoid.) Sixteen of us walked about a mile and a half to cover just a part of the trails that wind around swamps and through woods and sport two observation decks. We began at the cars where Blue Jays were doing aerobatic things they do at this time of year and then headed to the river to see a lone Double-crested Cormorant, a couple of Ring-billed Gulls and not much else. It picked up at the first observation deck with plenty of Wood Ducks, Red-winged Blackbirds, Yellow-rumped Warblers and a Cowbird.

(Continued on page 5)

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
Bryan's Road, Maryland 20616**

ADOPT AN OSPREY

Name: _____

Address: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____



You can choose to either adopt an Osprey from

Patuxent River

Potomac River

Piscataway National Park and Hard Bargain Farm, November 1, by Cora Fulton

After most of the group had passed a grove of pine trees, the sharp ears of Gwen Brewer/George Jett caught the sound of a Red-breasted Nuthatch. (I hope they will stay around this year.) The group proceeded to tally up a Red-shouldered Hawk, Cooper’s Hawk, Bald Eagle, Turkey and Black Vultures, Phoebe; Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy, and Pileated Woodpeckers; Northern Flickers, Belted Kingfisher, Cedar Waxwings, House Finch, Eastern Towhee, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Herring Gull, a flyover by a Greater Yellowlegs, and more to total 40 species.

The weather was absolutely gorgeous and the Potomac River calm for this field trip. A group of 12 gathered about 9:00 a.m. We meandered along the board walk overlooking the river and cove (with good view of Mount Vernon). We tallied Gadwall, Pintail, Mallard, Ring-necked Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, American Coot, Ring-billed Gull, Laughing Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, and four Bald Eagles.

Camp Merrick is a rich place with miles of trails which Robert Rainey, who runs the camp, is working hard to get cleared of Isabel’s damage. I, for one, hope we can do another trip there during the spring. Many thanks to Cora Fulton and Carmen Anderson for bringing the great tasting breads!

We saw no warblers on the woodland trails, but there were Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets. We also saw Savannah, Song, and White-throated Sparrows, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Northern Cardinal, and Carolina Chickadee. All in all, we tallied 43 species.

P.S. According to his e-mail George Jett also had a Yellow-billed Cuckoo I didn’t have.

We all enjoyed the bread provided by Arlene Bee. We thank Gwen Brewer and Shirley Wood for their “eagle” eyes, and Gwen for her “bionic” ears.

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. **Make check payable to Southern Maryland Audubon Society.**
- 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. **Make check payable to National Audubon Society.**
- Please **renew** my membership in the National Audubon Society and the local chapter, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. **Make check payable to National 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**
 (new/renewal)
- Individual/Family \$20
 - Senior/Student \$15
 - Optional Donation \$_____

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

JANUARY EVENTS

January 4—Sunday—Patuxent River Christmas Bird Count, St. Mary's Area Coordinator: Doug Lister, tel. 301-342-2670 (w) or 301-994-2582 (h). Calvert Area Coordinator: Andy Brown, tel. 410-535-5327 (w).

January 4—Sunday—Fort Belvoir Christmas Bird Count, MD Area Coordinator: Carol Gheblian, tel. 301-753-6754.

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

La Plata Community Building, Wills memorial Park, Charles County, La Plata

Birds of Prey: Raptors Rule, by Mike Callahan, Nanjemoy Environmental Education Center. This fascinating group of birds, which includes hawks, owls, and eagles, is the subject of a presentation that features live birds. Mike Callahan, local raptor enthusiast and expert will share his knowledge and give us the opportunity to see the birds up close. Bring your favorite young naturalist, as this will be a great program for all ages. Directions: From Rt. 6 in La Plata, go south on St. Mary's Ave. Just past Glen Albin Rd., look for the entrance to the park on the right. Follow the driveway to the community building.

January 10—Saturday—9:00 a.m. Field Trip

St. Mary's County. St. Mary's County Chase
Leader: Bob Boxwell (301-872-5998). Part of the fun of birding is keeping lists. Get a head start on your 2004 year list by joining us at Point Lookout State park, noted for its waterfowl concentrations. Trips in past years have included all three scoters, eiders, and a Harlequin Duck. Take Rt. 5 south to the park, and meet in the parking area nearest the lighthouse. (This may be at the picnic area some way up from the lighthouse, depending on the state of road repairs following damage from Hurricane Isabel.) Please come prepared for the cold, and dress in layers.

January 24—Saturday—2:30 p.m. Special Program

Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, Calvert County
Waterbirds on the Patuxent Estuary in Winter by Chris Swarth, Jug Bay Wetland Sanctuary. As a precursor to the sixth annual Patuxent Waterbird Count, the speaker presents findings from the previous five years. Cosponsored by Southern Maryland Audubon Society and Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust, this program is free of charge, and presented in the auditorium of the Calvert Marine Museum. See the article on page 2 for more information.

January 25—Sunday—2:00 p.m. Field Trip

Purse State Park, Charles County
Exploring Douglas Point Leader: George Wilmot (301-375-8552). Explore Douglas Point with SMAS naturalist George Wilmot, and leaders from Nanjemoy Vision and the Sierra Club. Come take a moderate walk through some wild country near Nanjemoy. We will likely see beaches, marshes, forest-dwelling birds, waterfowl, historic sites, and cliffs over the Potomac River. Meet at the parking lot of Purse State Park on Rt. 224 in southwestern Charles County. Dress for a two-hour hike in winter weather. For more information, contact George Wilmot, or Deanna Wheeler (Deanna@nanjemoy.net).

January 28—Wednesday—7:00 p.m. Board of Directors Meeting

The SMAS Board of Directors will meet at the SMECO building in Hughesville. Members are welcome to attend.

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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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