

The Osprey



June 2009 VOLUME 39, ISSUE 9

www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

THE BIG PICTURE

by George M. Jett

As some of you know, I did a Big Photographic Maryland year during 2008. My goal was to see if I could photograph 300 bird species in a single year in Maryland. People told me I was crazy to try, but with improved communication tools (cellphone, listserve, etc.), I think just identifying 300 species in a year is highly over-rated, so I went for a real challenge.

Is it possible? I considered some facts. My Maryland big year list is 311 (1994), and with the better communication tools I was thinking I could best that. My life ratio of state birds photographed to identified is 96.8 percent. Three hundred and eleven species times 96.8% = 301. With lots of help and luck, 300 would be possible. Also, the photographic list rule states the bird only has to be identifiable from the photo. It is not a photo contest. My judges were Matt Hafner, Michael O'Brien, and Jim Stasz – all professional level birders.

My strategy was to chase rare birds and pick up common ones along the way. I would use help from friends, listserve data, turn my cellphone on, hang out with good birders, and go out any day possible. I should hit high profile habitat during peak periods like Hart Miller Island during shorebird migration, Assateague often, songbird breeding grounds in western MD, and take all of Paulagics' trips offshore.

Dutifully I started on January 1 at a hummingbird feeder in St. Mary's County. I met David Holmes and Bruce Peterjohn at the feeder, and they confirmed Rufous Hummingbird. That was one rare bird down! Next I headed to Point Lookout with friends to look for the King Eider reported from the Point Lookout Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to Jim Brighton it was only a matter of time before the King Eider was in front of the lens. Next, Jim Stasz, also at Pt. Lookout, called and said "George, get up to the marina." Stasz did not tell me what bird it was. He wanted me to find it. I eventually found the Eared Grebe. Click! Twenty species down, 280 to go to my goal.

On January 2, I did some local photography, since Carol Gheblian was hosting a Yellow-throated Warbler at her feeders and Bob Lukinic had three Baltimore Orioles in his yard. I picked up another 18 species that day. January 3, the coldest day of the year found me sitting in a back yard near Annapolis waiting for a beautiful male Painted Bunting. Then I went to the coast for the Harlequin Ducks, Northern Saw-whet Owl, etc. By January's end I was at 132.

There are too many chase stories and rare birds to describe in an article in *The Osprey*. Brief highlights include

the Little Gull that Kye Jenkins reported from Back Bay, the summer Black-headed Gull that Fred Shaffer reported, the Mississippi Kites at Piscataway that Chris Ordiway called about, the Snowy Owl on Assateague that Dave Brinker asked if I was interested in, and the Connecticut Warbler that Mikey Lutmerding found in Charles County.

I got lucky on a few occasions as well. Studying the gulls at the frozen ponds in Waldorf, I found a second plumage cycle California Gull on January 23. That bird stayed until dark but was not to be found the next morning in spite of diligent searching by quality birders. I had a new county record but no one to share it with. I also had great help from Kyle Rambo to have access to the Patuxent River Naval Air Station to photograph the hard to approach grassland birds. How many calls did Mark Hoffman, Bill Hubick, Ed Boyd, and others make to get me on to another bird? Thanks to all that help.

I made a couple of mistakes during the year; otherwise I think 310 would have been possible. I missed Golden Eagle because I did not sit at Dan's Rock or Sideling Hill during migration. My plan to get this species at Blackwater was unsuccessful. Another mistake was spending the day in Charles County during a September tropical storm looking for new county records instead of going to Ocean City inlet and hanging out with Marshall Iliff and others. I got a Pectoral Sandpiper. They got Sooty Tern and Parasitic Jaeger. So much for being loyal to your home county.

A handful of species would not cooperate, despite my best efforts. Wilson's Phalarope, Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, and Tennessee Warbler come to mind. September and October were low points of my year as I wondered if I would even reach 290. Fortunately November came through big time with Common Eider, Long-eared Owl, Northern Shrike, Western Kingbird, Lark Sparrow (#300), and Brewer's Blackbird.

My luck continued into December with Thayer's Gull, Eurasian Wigeon and Black-legged Kittiwake. Finally, on the 22nd I got a call from Lee Duer of the Waldorf Wildbird Center. He reported a hummingbird coming to a feeder in Prince Frederick. The next morning I photographed it just before I was to fly to Michigan for Christmas. The network continued to work. I literally dropped my jaw when David Holmes told me the bird was the first state record of an Allen's Hummingbird. That was species #307 for 2008. What a way to end the year. I will now sit back to see if some young hotshot wants to best that number. Incidentally I ended up with 316 identified during 2008. My ratio of

Continued on page 2

identified to photographed species is still pretty good at 97 percent.

If you want to see some of the images I took during 2008 (thanks to J.B. Churchill for setting up the website), go to www.georgejett.net. I have also put together a PowerPoint program on the big photo year and will be giving it to any organization interested. If interested, please contact me at gmjett@comcast.net to hear and see more about my project.

In order to justify the expense and carbon footprint, I decided to do this as a fundraising effort to help protect the Blue-billed Curassow, a critically endangered bird in Colombia. The Blue-billed Curassow project is supported by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC). Check out ABC at <http://www.abcbirds.org/>. If you want to help, please contact Lindsay K. Shumate, Campaign Coordinator, American Bird Conservancy, P.O. Box 249, The Plains, VA 20198, or email her at: lshumate@abcbirds.org. All donations are fully tax-deductible. American Bird Conservancy is a 501(c)(3), non-profit, registered organization under the IRS code. You will get a letter of acknowledgment from ABC thanking you for your support for tax purposes. Write your checks to the **American Bird Conservancy** and note that it is for the Blue-billed Curassow project. So far I have raised over **\$10,000**. Please help me raise more. Thanks.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Thomas Stone Historic Site, April 18, by Ann Wearmouth. Weather at the April 18 birding trip at Thomas Stone National Historic Site in Port Tobacco started out clear and warm as we waited across the road at Stones Throw for a critical mass of birders to show up. (The gates of the park don't open until 9:00, but the site is open from sunrise till sunset.) Although the quorum never showed, our small, select group had a beautiful morning of birding. The forest scrub at the entrance, a remnant of the April 2002 tornado, was good for some of the old standbys (Am. Crow, Northern Flicker, European Starling, Tufted Titmouse) and the first of many highly agitated Chipping Sparrows we were to run into that day. A bevy of Cedar Waxwings in a cedar tree greeted us as we ducked under the closed gate and started down the long driveway that leads to the home, known when I was growing up, as Habre de Venture. The fields weren't terribly productive, but we saw a Brown Thrasher and Northern Cardinal popping in and out of a hedgerow. Things got interesting as we passed the Stone burial plot and headed through wooded gullies down towards the lower fields. Northern Parula gave us great views at the wood edges, and in the interior we heard a Blue-headed Vireo, which wouldn't show itself.

We continued to the bottomland, observing some of the spring flowers along the way; tiny bluets bobbed in the pathway and spring beauty carpeted the forest edges, while the yellow of escaped daffodils, saffras globes and fading

spicebush contributed to the spring feel. We wandered around the wetlands west of the power lines and to a point overlooking Hoghole Run where we picked up Hermit Thrush and Great Blue Heron, but no other waterbirds. Heading back toward the Park Headquarters we had great views of a Yellow-throated Vireo and a not so great one of the only raptor seen, a Cooper's Hawk being mobbed by other birds. After signing in at the Visitor's Center, we made another pass around the backside of the woods where we had heard the Blue-headed Vireo, passing through the terraced yard of the now restored home of one of Maryland's Signers of the Declaration of Independence (burned in 1977). No sight or sound of the vireo. The day was starting to get downright hot and we ended the 4-hour walk with a total of 42 species. For those who haven't visited the Thomas Stone Site, I highly recommend checking it out.

A short report on the April 25 SMAS field trip to Maxwell Hall, by George Jett. On Saturday, April 25 twelve birders (see attached photo) headed out into the woods at Maxwell Hall Park (not the equestrian part), a relatively new county park in eastern Charles County near Benedict. This nice wooded system of trails offers some rich birding and botany, with a good view of Swanson's Creek at the bottom of the trail.

We had good weather and good fellowship along the way as we discovered 53 species of birds on our four hour foray. Of note was the 175 (I counted them) Ruddy Ducks loafing on the creek. Mixed in were one female Canvasback and one Lesser Scaup. While we watched the creek two migrant Caspian Terns flew in, circled the creek, and exited back to deeper waters. Bald Eagle and Osprey soared in the distant thermals with Turkey and Black vultures, and one Red-tailed Hawk.

Along the interior of the forest I am apt to mimic Barred Owl to see what responses the birds might provide. On four separate occasions we had "tom" turkeys respond with their rapid exploding gobbles. That treated the group. On one occasion a Pileated Woodpecker nervously visited with the group before departing for deeper woods.

When Gwen Brewer and I set up this trip we had hoped the timing would provide some nice neotropical migrants on their return from the tropics. The species list for that category of birds was short but we did find three species of vireos including one singing Blue-headed. Wood Thrush and numerous Ovenbirds had arrived and were very vocal. The warbler list tallied at nine, which included singing Louisiana Waterthrush and Yellow-throated Warbler. The treat for me was the Ovenbird that did his strut in front of the group as he sauntered across our path.

Both tanager species occur and are likely nesting here. The mature forest mix includes deciduous and Virginia Pine,

Continued on page 3

their preferred habitat. One Summer Tanager gave its easy to remember "Ticky tuck" call. The song is more difficult to remember since it is similar to our American Robin, but sweeter. The sparrow count was short at three with good numbers of expected Eastern Towhees, migrant White-throated Sparrows, and a single singing Field Sparrow.

Along the way some participants were looking down instead of up. Plant people will do that. Along one trail they found some Showy Orchis, *Galearis spectabilis* just making flower buds. Perhaps in two weeks these plants might make some nice pictures. This species is an indication of the ecological richness of this forest, and I encourage our members to go take a look.



April 25th Maxwell Hall field trip participants.
Photo by George Jett.

NOMINEES FOR ANNUAL ELECTION

The Nominating Committee presents the following slate of nominees for election at the Annual Business Meeting to be held on Sunday, June 7 at Chapman State Park. Additional nominations may be made from the floor.

For President, Bob Lukinic
For Vice President, Mike Callahan
For Secretary, Lynne Wheeler
For Treasurer, Will Daniel
For Director, Heather Burk (replacing Mary Sokol)
For Director, Ernest Willoughby

SPECIAL EVENT AT ANNUAL MEETING!

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT BOB LUKINIC

Dear Members:

This year at our Sunday, June 7th annual meeting we have expanded the schedule of activities to include the dedication ceremony of Chapman State Park as an Important Bird Area (IBA). The dedication ceremony will take place at the historic Mount Aventine Manor House located at Chapman State Park, 3452 Ferry Place, Indian Head, MD. At the dedication ceremony, SMAS and Audubon Maryland-DC will recognize the outstanding conservation efforts of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources personnel and others who made significant contributions to the IBA designation.

The Important Bird Area Program in Maryland and DC is part of an international initiative involving over 150 countries. This park's IBA designation is shared with only 25 other natural areas in Maryland.

SMAS and MD-DC Audubon have invited our elected officials, park managers, other conservation groups, and interested persons to this ceremony. Because of the additional attendees expected, the main part of the buffet lunch is being brought in from local establishments. We are asking those planning to bring a potluck dish to bring side dishes (such as salads, vegetables) and desserts.

The schedule for the day's events will be:

10:00 am - park will open
10:30 am - bird walk lead by Dave Curson, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon MD-DC.
12:00 noon - dedication ceremony
Presentation of awards
Buffet lunch
Historical overview of Mt. Aventine by Local Historian Elmer Biles
Annual SMAS business meeting

We hope you can attend this most important event at one of Southern Maryland's most treasured sites. For further questions, please contact Bob Lukinic, at (301)283-6317, or by e-mail at rlukinic@peoplepc.com.

Sincerely,
Bob Lukinic, President
Southern Maryland Audubon Society

AUDUBON MAGAZINE ANNOUNCES CALL FOR ENTRIES FOR THE AUDUBON MAGAZINE PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS: BIRDS IN FOCUS

In Association with
Nature's Best Photography Magazine,
Awards Sponsored by Nikon

New York, NY-April 20, 2009— *Audubon* magazine is launching the 2009 Audubon Magazine Photography Awards: Birds in Focus, created to celebrate the beauty and diversity of birdlife through the art of photography, and to honor the exceptional work of talented professional, amateur and youth photographers from all over the U.S.

Audubon will be accepting submissions online until July 15 in three categories: Professional, Amateur, and Youth. Photographers are encouraged to reveal a new angle or perspective in their work. "Think creatively," advises *Audubon's* design director Kevin Fisher, one of the judges. "Originality and drama rank high at *Audubon*. Include tight shots, such as close-ups of eyes, feathers. We welcome uncommon perspectives."

Other judges include renowned wildlife photographer Joel Sartore, a regular contributor to *Audubon* and *National Geographic*; Kim Hubbard, longtime *Audubon* photography editor and an accomplished photographer in her own right whose work featuring the birds of Bonaire is currently on exhibit at the Greenwich (CT) Audubon Center; and Steve Freigh, publisher of *Nature's Best Photography*.

The Award winners will be announced in December and will see their work showcased within the pages of both *Audubon* and *Nature's Best Photography* magazines, as well as on their respective websites. An impressive array of prizes will be awarded, including top-of-the-line photo and optic equipment from award sponsor, Nikon. **Prizes include:**

- Journey to Peru's Tambopata National Reserve (Inkaterra Amazonica Lodge)
- An ultimate birding safari to Australia's "Top End," the Northern Territory
- 14-day Tropical Rivers and Rainforest cruise through South America (Travel Dynamics International)
- Opportunity to travel to Honduras with *Audubon* wildlife photographer Roy Toft as your photographer/guide (Roy Toft Photo Safaris and Pico Bonito Lodge)
- A Nikon D80 digital SLR camera, 18-55mm NIKKOR VR lens, and a set of Nikon EDG 8x32 binoculars

Submissions: Accepted May 15 - July 15, 2009.
Up to 10 images per entrant. For details, visit
www.AudubonMagazinePhotoAwards.com

FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED

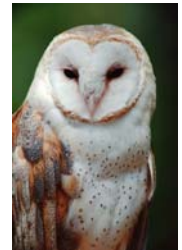


Southern Maryland Audubon Society sponsors the banding of nestling birds of prey, or raptors, with serially numbered aluminum bands in cooperation with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U. S. Department of the Interior, as part of our bird research and conservation activities in Southern Maryland. Limited 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
P.O. Box 181
Bryans Road, MD 20616



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)

JUNE EVENTS

June 7—**Sunday**—10:00 AM to 5:00 PM. **Annual Meeting.** Chapman State Park, Mount Aventine, Charles County. 3452 Ferry Place, off Chapman's Landing Road, Indian Head.

Dedication of Chapman State Park as an Important Bird Area, and Election of SMAS officers for the 2009-2010 activity year. This year we are combining our traditional annual meeting schedule with the dedication of Chapman State Park as an IBA. The schedule of events:

Bring your family, friends, and a favorite side dish or dessert, and join us at this beautiful setting on the Potomac River. The 1840 Mount Aventine manor house will be open. See the message from Bob Lukinic on page 3 for more information. As we will be bringing in food from local suppliers, we are asking you to bring side dishes and desserts, rather than main dishes, to share.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

10:00, the park opens.

10:30 AM, mid-morning bird walk.

12:00 Noon, IBA Dedication ceremony and presentation of awards

Combined potluck and catered buffet lunch

Historical overview of Mount Aventine by local historian Elmer Biles

SMAS business meeting and election of officers.

EDITOR: Ernest Willoughby

18335 Hartman Drive, Lexington Park, MD 20653

Telephone: (301) 862-9631

E-mail: ejwilloughby@aol.com

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

US POSTAGE
PAID
Non-profit
Standard Mail
#646174

In This Issue:

- **George's Big Photo Year**
- **Annual Meeting**
- **Reports from the Field**