

The Osprey

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society



Painted Turtle
Photo by: George Jett

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Please join us!
BLUE CRABS FUNDRAISER

June 22, 2014
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<http://somdaudubon.org/>

Maryland Reptile And Amphibian Atlas Project – The Final Chapter by George M. Jett

The Natural History Society of Maryland (NHSM) and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) are completing a five-year study called the Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas (MARA). We started in January 2010, and will finish the study in December 2014.

Even though the first four years were a great success, we still have much to do to meet our targets. We are in the final year, and your help is needed.

Amphibians and reptiles, collectively known as “herpetofauna” or “herps,” have roamed the earth for over 300 million years. Herps to you and me are turtles, lizards, snakes, salamanders, frogs and toads.

While today’s collection of herps pales in comparison to the diversity and abundance of these creatures during their heyday, their persistence to the present day is a testament to their overall success. However, the increasing challenges that amphibians and reptiles face – in no small part resulting from human-induced causes such as habitat loss, introduced species, over harvesting or collecting, and environmental pollution- raise concerns for their continued success and even survival. Worldwide declines in amphibian and reptile populations have been occurring at an accelerated rate over the past twenty years, threatening many species with extinction.

This atlas is an effort to get a snapshot of the herp populations across Maryland. The last snapshot of the herps in Maryland was during 1975 by Herbert S. Harris, Jr. The current project is mapping the distribution of all amphibians and reptiles within the state, using mostly volunteer help to search for the roughly 93 species found in Maryland. Each county is divided into quadrants (quads), and each quad is divided into six blocks. Each of the 23 counties in Maryland also has a coordinator. The southern Maryland county coordinators are listed below.

As an Osprey reader you likely live in one of these blocks in southern Maryland. Herps around your property count, as well as any you find while driving the roads (alive or dead), or visiting the parks, using the rail trail, or anywhere in our region. For example, if you are driving along a local road (e. g. Durham Church Road) in Charles County and see a Snapping Turtle, note the date, take a picture if possible (cellphones work), and send the information to the appropriate county coordinator. Images are important in getting the correct species of the animal. For example, Mud and Musk Turtles can be confusing to some. American and Fowler’s Toads as well.

If you are more interested in the atlas (great for getting kids outdoors), the way you can get involved is to also contact the coordinator for the county in which

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you live, and volunteer to search a specific area (block). If you are an experienced herper we really want to encourage you to get involved.

Much more detail about the atlas including training manuals, data sheets, etc., can be found at:

<http://www.marylandnature.org/mara>.

You can also keep up on the project at Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/MDHerpAtlas>.

The monthly newsletters are particularly useful, and fun to read.

We have a good variety of herps in southern Maryland we have 14 turtle species, 5 lizards, 18 species of snakes, 9 salamanders, and 15 species of frogs. A list of these can be viewed at the website above. Three examples that you might find around your house are attached. Painted Turtles are now out sunning on warm days, Northern Black Racers are emerging, and Spotted Salamanders have already laid their eggs.

A few words about snakes in our region. Of the 18 native snakes in southern Maryland, the only poisonous snake here is Northern Copperhead and these are hard to find in suburban areas. Most reports I get of Copperhead are misidentified young Black Racers, Hognose Snakes, or Northern Watersnakes.

Also, contrary to the local misconception, there are absolutely no documented naturally occurring Cottonmouths in Maryland. If a Cottonmouth was here it would have been introduced by someone and released. The closest native population of Cottonmouths (sometimes called water moccasins) are in south eastern Virginia, several hundred miles away. If anyone tells you they have seen a Cottonmouth or a water moccasin in Maryland they miss-identified the animal. What is normally mistaken for Cottonmouth is Northern Watersnake. Northern Watersnakes are not poisonous. They are aggressive, can give a nasty bite (not poisonous), and have white skin inside of their mouth which leads to the misidentification. There also are no rattlesnakes in Southern Maryland. The closest Timber Rattlesnakes are in northern Frederick or Baltimore Counties.

Regardless of the species, please keep a healthy distance from any snake so as not to hurt the snake. Also, please do not kill any snake. It is illegal, and snakes are very beneficial animals to the environment. A number will strike at you, bite if they make contact, and rattle their tails like rattlesnakes, but all but Copperhead are not poisonous. Black Racer and Northern Watersnake, especially when cornered, will become defensive, but if you give them a chance they will go on their way. I have encountered a number of Copperheads and are still here to write about it because I gave them space to retreat.

All herps are cold-blooded animals, and you will see

snakes basking on hot roads to warm. Frogs and toads, are on the move across roads on rainy nights, and turtles are also frequently sighted crossing roads. Please try to avoid hitting any animals while you are driving. If you see a turtle on the road, please try to take it off the road, and put it in the side of the road it was heading. Be careful of Snapping Turtles. They can give a nasty bite, but they don't hang on until sundown if they do bite.

The three local county coordinators can be contacted at their emails, and will appreciate any help you can provide:

Calvert: Andy Brown (brownaj@co.cal.md.us)
Charles: George Jett (gmjett@comcast.net)
St. Mary's: Kyle Rambo (kyle.rambo@navy.mil)

If you want to get involved or have questions, please contact your county coordinator.

As one who loves nature, this has proven to be an exciting and educational study. Great fun for both adults and kids.

Come join us. Thanks in advance.

George Jett - Waldorf, MD 20603 gmjett@comcast.net
www.georgejett.net

2014 Science Fair and Expo Winners

Congratulations to this year's SMAS award winners and many thanks to the judges for their donation of time and expertise.

St. Mary's County Science and Engineering Fair Judged by Michael Patterson and Nicole Patterson

Senior Award: Rupali Shah, Oiler Alert! Oiler Alert!
Bioremediation with Algae, Great Mills High School
Junior Award: Natalie Wolfe, Piezoelectric Shoes: A Power Plant in Motion, Spring Ridge Middle School

Charles County Science Fair Judged by Lynne Wheeler

Senior Award: Anna Radtke, Is the Port Tobacco River in Your Backyard IV? North Point High School
Junior Award: Brittany Renfro, A Natural Way to Clean Dirty Water Using Natural Coagulants to Reduce Water Turbidity, Davis Middle School

Calvert County Science and Engineering Expo Judged by Sue Hamilton

Senior Award: Alison Worth, Fertilizer Impact on Algae Blooms, Northern High School
Junior Award: (team project) Sarah Donaldson, Mac Howlin, Hanna Porter, Solanum lycopersicum Magnified, Northern Middle School

All winners were presented with certificates of award from SMAS. Southern Maryland junior and senior division winners received one-year memberships in the National Audubon Society.

Introducing A Divorce Rate For Birds, And Guess Which Bird Never, Ever Divorces?

Albatrosses mate for life and are incredibly faithful to their partners. There is love. And then there's albatross love.

In his new book, "The Thing With Feathers", Noah Strycker says albatrosses have a knack for coupling. "These globe trotters, who mate for life and are incredibly faithful to their partners, just might have the most intense love affairs of any animal on our planet," he writes. Noah knows "love" is a word normally reserved for humans. Technically, what albatrosses do is "pair bond." But call it what you will, he says — "to see what real devotion is like, you need to spend some quality time with an albatross."

They are seabirds. They spend 95 percent of their time sailing through the air for thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands of miles. They fish. They rest on the oceans' surface. They can go for years never seeing land. But they are born on dry land.

Albatrosses lay one egg at a time. The chick's parents build a nest near the place where they, in turn, had been born. Albatrosses lay one egg at a time. Once the chick's feathers grow in so it can stay warm, its parents fly off, coming back for occasional food deliveries. But typically the chick "spends a full nine months sitting alone ... in its nest, most of the time in quiet contemplation of its surroundings since it has no siblings."

It grows slowly. Then, one day, when it feels ready, it picks up, and with no instruction, it flings itself into the air and flies out to sea. It will stay out there for six years until it feels the urge to mate. Then all the albatrosses from its generation head back, one by one, to their native island — usually to a spot alongside the ocean where they land, gather and, one by one, they begin — to dance.

Noah writes, the "two birds face each other, patter their feet to stay close as they move forward and backward, each testing the other's reflexes, and point their beaks at the sky." "Then, as they simultaneously utter a chilling scream, the albatrosses each extend their wings to show off the full 12-foot span, facing off while continuing to jockey for position. They touch beaks, throw their heads back again and scream."

For a long while they will dance with several partners, but gradually — it can take years to pick the right partner — they will find a particular favorite. Together those two continue to refine their steps, until, having "spent so much time dancing with that specific bird ... that pair's sequence of moves is as unique as a lover's fingerprint." Now they are ready to mate. It has taken 15 years to decide on a partner, but having decided, albatrosses don't switch. "It will generally stick faithfully with its mate until one of them dies, which might not be for another fifty years."

This is not true of most birds. In 1996, Jeffrey Black compiled a table of bird divorce rates for his book, "Partnership in Birds". He collected data on 100 or so different species, all of which form long-term partnerships. "Slam-bang, thank-you ma'am" hookup types weren't included. Then he looked to see how often these birds break up before either one dies.

Flamingos, it turns out, are embarrassing. They break up 99 percent of the time. The divorce rate for piping plovers is 67 percent. Ducks do better than humans. Human marriages (American ones) fail at a rate of roughly 40 percent (which is about equal to Nazca Boobies). Mallard marriages are 91 percent successful.

The big shock was swans. Everybody, ornithologists included, figured swans would be at the top of the Most Faithful list. But they're not. They have a 5 percent divorce rate. So who's the champ? Do I need to say? Albatrosses are 100 percent faithful.

That's not to say that albatross dads don't occasionally have a dalliance with ladies who aren't their mates. That happens. But the original pair stays intact — which is surprising when you consider that albatross couples can last for decades. The oldest known female, Noah writes, is "named Wisdom, who, as of 2013, was still raising chicks at the age of 62."

What's more, they don't see each other that often. When at sea, couples don't hang together. It's too easy to get separated. "So even the most committed partners habitually spend months at a time alone, without knowing what their mates are up to."

They don't build nests every year. Often, they'll wait for two. But when the urge is on them, somehow they both manage to return to the nesting site at roughly the same time "almost as if the date were prearranged" and they settle in.

"There are few distractions in the life of an albatross, so the birds concentrate on things that matter most — such as one another. They often sleep with the head of one bird cozily pillowed against the breast of its mate," Noah writes.

Whatever it is that brings them together, albatrosses turn out to be among the animal kingdom's most successful couplers. Nobody knows what they've got that makes them this way.

"Different people report seeing various things deep in the inky-black eyes of an albatross," Noah writes. "Wisdom, serenity, wilderness, peace, endurance — which are well and good, but all I see — is love."

Robert Krulwich on Science
NPR
April 22, 2014 7:10 AM ET

SMAS Birdathon

Gwen Brewer, Kathy Calvert, Jim Green and George Jett will be attempting to break the current Charles County Big Day record of 140 species on May 14. This is a fundraising opportunity where donors can pledge either a flat amount or per species. ABA rules will be followed (24 hour period from midnight to midnight, etc. See this link for more info: <http://listing.aba.org/big-day-count-rules/>). George Jett is the king of Charles County birding so count on their team giving the record a good run for the money!

To pledge send email to
Lynne Wheeler at comstockel@aol.com

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Margaret Abraham, Leonardtown
William Beacham, Lexington Park
William H. Cavitt, Fort Washington
Jay Fredge, Prince Frederick
Macy Hovland, Lexington Park
Mary L. Raley, Lexington Park
Melinda S. Scott, Accokeek
Ann R. Waring, Leonardtown



SOUTHERN MARYLAND BLUE CRABS
Your Town. Your Team.

FUNDRAISING PROGRAM

Tickets ONLY \$13.00

Southern Maryland Audubon Society

Sunday, June 22nd
Game Time: 2:05 PM
Regency Furniture Stadium

\$6.50
of each ticket
is donated to:



Buying Tickets is Simple!

1. Go to www.somdbluecrabs.com and click on the "Fun-Raisers" tab.
2. Click on your group's fundraising icon.
3. Enter your fundraising code.
4. Click "Buy".
5. Select your seats and complete your order.

Our Fundraising code is:
SMAS

Questions? Contact: Lynne Wheeler at 301-751-8097
or Blue Crabs Representative Samantha Slovik at 301-374-1128

code is case sensitive
standard ticket fees apply



somdbluecrabs.com ♦ 301.638.9788



D.C. Owl Set To Be Released From Rehab (Ricky Carioti/The Washington Post)

The Snowy Owl that captivated the region when it appeared in downtown D.C. — only to get hit by a bus, evade police for hours and eventually wind up in a rehabilitation facility in Minnesota — will finally be released back into the wild this weekend.

After finishing rehab at the University of Minnesota's Raptor Center, the Snowy Owl will be released Saturday [April 19] along the northern border between Minnesota and Wisconsin, the center said Friday.

"Once the Snowy Owl is released, what it will do is speculation," Raptor Center clinic manager Lori Arent said in a statement. "It may stay in the area for a few days, but its migratory urge will eventually encourage it to move north. The upper Midwest makes a lot of sense as a starting point for that journey."

Snowy Owls had flocked to points across the Eastern United States and beyond last winter, captivating scientists, birders and people startled to see an Arctic bird so far from the Arctic. One theory suggested by scientists posits that a spike in the lemming population may have caused the birds, fat from a lemming buffet, to fly farther in search of more food.

The female D.C. owl seemingly first appeared in downtown Washington in January, prompting pedestrians to stop, gawk and snap photos on their cameras. It appeared days later perched on a ledge outside The Washington Post's headquarters, leading to a large group of rotating observers gathering on the sidewalk below.

But the next week, the owl's story took an outlandish turn: It was hit by a Metrobus and then an SUV. Somehow, the owl not only survived but also proceeded to lead police on a two-hour chase through downtown before officers were able to capture it.

The owl was taken to the National Zoo for treatment and then to City Wildlife, a D.C. rehabilitation facility. Later, it was taken to the Minnesota center to finish rehab and pick up some replacement feathers to sub for wing feathers that looked burned or singed, which could have been caused by flying over a heat source.

These feathers were replaced to allow the owl to properly fly and maneuver in the wild, and a test flight this month was a success, the center said.

The owl's release comes nearly three months after it was first spotted in the District, along with another, less-heralded Snowy Owl patient from Wisconsin.

Southern Maryland Audubon Society

ADOPT-A-RAPTOR

Foster Parents Needed!!



The Southern Maryland Audubon Society supports raptor conservation and research projects in the Southern Maryland area through the "Adopt-A-Raptor" Program. The program currently includes four species: **Osprey, Barn Owl, American Kestrel and Northern Saw-whet Owl.** Each bird is banded by a licensed bird bander with a serially numbered metal band, in cooperation with the U.S. Bird Banding Laboratory. A limited number of birds are available for adoption each year!

NEW FOR 2013!! "Adopt-A-Nest" now available for Osprey, Barn Owl & Kestrels!

Adoptive "parents" will receive:

A certificate of adoption with the bird's band number, and location and date of banding.

Information on the ecology and migration patterns of the species

Any other pertinent information that may become available

Your support helps provide:

- Barn Owl Nest Boxes
- Osprey Nesting Platforms
- Kestrel Nest Boxes
- Mist Nets or Banding Supplies

Complete the form below to "Adopt-A-Raptor" with the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

Mail completed form to: *Melissa Boyle, Adopt-a-Raptor,
10455 Point Lookout Rd. Scotland, MD 20687*

Name: _____
as it should appear on Adoption Certificate

Address: _____

I wish to adopt:

_____ (# of) Osprey, \$10 each / \$25 per nest

_____ (# of) Barn Owl, \$25 each / \$50 per nest

_____ (# of) Northern Saw-whet Owl, \$30 each

_____ (# of) American Kestrel, \$35 each / \$75 per nest

Amount Enclosed: _____

Make checks payable to: Southern Maryland Audubon Society

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 17 & 18 – SATURDAY and Sunday morning

Field Trip

**Barn Owls & Breakfast, Charles County,
Youth especially welcome!**

Mid-May to early June, Exact date to be determined, it all depends on the owls!! Watch our Osprey newsletter or website for date and details.

Leader: Mike Callahan (240-765-5192,
raptorsrulemc@gmail.com)

A new version of B&B! Come and enjoy breakfast before helping our Raptor Conservation Committee Chairman Mike check a Barn Owl nest box, and hopefully banding the nestling owls. This trip takes place on private property in Charles County and the location will not be advertised. The date is dependent on the age of the nestling owls. RSVP required. Directions will be given upon reservation. There is a small fee involved to cover the cost of food. Please bring your own reusable plate, mug and utensils to help make this a “greener” trip. Limited space available.

June 1 – SUNDAY – 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Annual Meeting

Clearwater Nature Center, Prince George’s County

11000 Thrift Road, Clinton, MD 20735

Potluck Lunch	1:00 – 2:15
Host’s Welcome	2:15 – 2:30
Meeting	2:30 – 3:00
Bird Walk	3:00 – 4:00

Come join SMAS for our Annual Picnic Meeting at this wonderful nature center located within Cosca Regional Park, a part of Prince George’s County Parks and Recreation. Clearwater Nature Center features a small indoor pond, live animal exhibits, a lapidary workshop, and seasonal gardens. Directions from Waldorf, take 301 north, at the Rt. 301/Rt. 5 split, bear left onto Rt. 5 (Branch Ave.). At second light, turn left onto Brandywine Rd. At next light, turn left onto Thrift Rd. Remain on Thrift Rd. 1.5 miles until you see the sign on your right for Clearwater Nature Center.

June 7 – SATURDAY – 11:00 p.m. (yes!!)

Field Trip

Flag Ponds, Calvert County

**“FULL MOON HORSESHOE CRAB ADVENTURE AT
FLAG PONDS”**

Leaders: Andy Brown and Melissa Boyle
(melissaboyle3@gmail.com, or 443-340-3035)

The horseshoe crab is one of nature’s miracles, and their eggs fuel the amazing migration of shorebirds! Want to see horseshoe crabs spawning on the beach by moonlight? Join us for this unique chance at water’s edge. Bring flashlights, wear comfortable walking shoes that can get wet. Meet at the gate to Flag Ponds. RSVP to Melissa (see above) by June 4.

June 22 – SUNDAY – 2:00 p.m. **PLAY BALL!!!!**

“FUN”-Raiser

**Regency Furniture Stadium, Waldorf, MD
11765 St. Linus Drive, Waldorf, MD 20602**

**Southern Maryland Blue Crabs Baseball “FUN” - Raising
for SMAS**

Please help us raise funds to send a southern Maryland teacher to Audubon Camp at Hog Island, Maine. Audubon helps to provide environmental and avian education to our teachers so they can educate our children. Your \$13.00 ticket will provide \$6.50 to SMAS, and you can have a fun afternoon! Tickets MUST be ordered online!

- Go to www.somdbluecrabs.com
- Click on the SMAS Fundraising icon
- Enter our fundraising code: SMAS
- Click “Buy”
- Select your seats and complete your order

June 27 – FRIDAY – 2:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Field Trip

**Patuxent River Park – Jug Bay, Prince George’s
County**

“OSPREY BANDING TRIP”

Leaders: Melissa Boyle (melissaboyle3@gmail.com, or 443-340-3035) and Greg Kearns

Join us for our annual Southern Maryland Audubon Society Osprey Banding Trip at Jug Bay. Do not hesitate to sign up for this event if you have never been lucky to experience this truly beautiful park and see Osprey chicks up close and personal. The parks naturalist, Greg Kearns is one of the best in his field and provides a very entertaining, fact-filled and fun outing. **This opportunity is limited to 15 participants!** Youths Welcome (younger than 12 with adult). Cost is \$12/person, payable the day of the trip. RSVP to Melissa (see above) by June 23.

Spotted Salamander
Photo by: George Jett



EDITOR: Tyler Bell E-mail: jtylerbell@yahoo.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.

2013-2014 Officers

**President, Mike Callahan (240-765-5192)
Vice-President, Michael Patterson (301-752-5763)
Secretary, Lynne Wheeler (301-743-3236)
Treasurer, Will Daniel (240-518-8006)**