

The Osprey

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society



American Woodcock
Photo by: Bill Hubick

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<http://somdaudubon.org/>

MOS Conference To Be Held In Southern Maryland by Jane Kostenko

The Maryland Ornithological Society last held its annual conference in the Southern Maryland region in 2005 and is slated to return to the area this spring.

From Friday, May 16, through Sunday, May 18, birders from all over Maryland will converge on the Holiday Inn on Solomons to go on field trips, view research posters, attend a raptor ID workshop, listen to keynote speakers, socialize at a wine and cheese reception, shop at a conference-special bookstore, and bid on unique items at a silent auction. You do not need to be a member to attend. Registration cost is \$65, with additional fees for meals; hotel registration is also separate. Contact Janet Shields at 410-901-1039 or janetbill@prodigy.net for full conference details.

Keynote speakers are Bill Hubick and Jim Brighton, who will talk about the Maryland Biodiversity Project (MBP). According to the conference brochure, the MBP was started in June of 2012 and plans to catalog all of the living things of Maryland. So far, more than 11,000 species have been cataloged!

SMAS's own Tyler Bell is coordinating the field trips and many local, as well as other Maryland, birders will be leading the trips in the tri-county area. Night birding will also be offered on Friday and Saturday nights.

If you just want to visit the bookstore and bid on auction items, you are not required to register and may simply come to the Holiday Inn during the following times: Friday from 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and from 8 to 9 p.m.; and Saturday from 10 to 5:30 p.m. (All final bids for the silent auction are due on Saturday at 5:30 p.m., so you must be present to see if you won and to pay and collect your items.)

Of note is that all funds raised from the silent auction (and a separate raffle) will go to the Mattawoman Watershed Society.



Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum Trip, February 9, 2014 by Tyler Bell

The blizzard of the century, which had been milling about as rumors on the internet, failed to appear. Nine intrepid birders did appear, however. We started at the parking lot near the museum mostly listening to Yellow-rumped Warblers chipping in the brush and trees nearby. Once everyone had arrived, we piled into several cars and headed to Peterson Point at the mouth of St. Leonard Creek. Scanning the river and the creek netted a nice assortment of waterfowl including a flyby flock of 18 Redheads, an uncommon duck in Calvert County. Long-tailed Ducks (formerly Oldsquaw) were, typically, far out in the river but the calm conditions allowed for nice scope views. Sherman Suter found a Ring-necked Duck which remained elusive for the rest of the group.

Next stop was the dilapidated pier from the old Academy of Natural Sciences lab. Scanning the water turned up a White-winged Scoter, rare on the river. Due to the severe cold this winter, the Great Lakes are about 80% frozen forcing waterfowl further south to our benefit. Included in this surge is Red-necked Grebe which we were unable to locate through the course of the trip.

Usually the final stop on my tour, the end of Lloyd Bowen Road, this was now a mid-point as we changed plans for an unplanned set of stops later. Brown-headed Nuthatch is a very local breeder in Calvert and Lloyd Bowen Road is a reliable spot for them. Often, they can be found in some large Loblolly Pines at the very end of the road but this day, we found them in the small patch of pines about 0.1 miles from the end. Although the nuthatches were busy feeding, we were able to get scope views of a couple of birds including one that was hammering at a pine seed on the top of a dead tree trunk.

Onward in pursuit of two recently reported rarities: Snowy Owl and Ross's Goose. On February 7, a white goose was reported near Benedict. On February 8, it was found in Calvert, just across the river. The first sighting was as a Snow Goose, the second as a Ross's Goose, a first county record in Calvert. Photos from February 8 show a diminutive white goose with a rounded head and pink bill with no grin patch, all good features for Ross's and not Snow. Regardless, the bird was not to be found in any of the fields where it had been the previous two days. Emails later indicated that the goose had flown north along the river around 8:30 am but returned to the corn stubble field in Calvert around 1:30 pm. The Snowy Owl, photographed in Benedict on February 6, was not to be found anywhere. These two birds would have been lifers for many of the participants. Can't win 'em all!

The trip tally was 56 birds! Had we worked the landbirding aspect a bit harder, we likely could have broken 60. Maybe next year?



Adult male White-winged Scoter
Photo by: Bill Hubick

Patuxent CBC by Andy Brown

Despite the awful weather conditions on Sunday Dec 29, the Pax River count was quite successful. 23 observers logged 62.5 count hours and tallied 94 species. This was not our best or worst year. We added one new species for the count. Patty Craig had a Cackling Goose mixed in with a flock of Canada Geese at Cove Point. Common Mergansers were observed for the second year in a row at the lake in the Chesapeake Ranch Estates where Jan Degeneffe had all 3 merganser species. Brown-headed Nuthatches were heard at Broome's Island again, making 2 consecutive years with this species at 2 locations within the count area. Jim Swift picked up 2 Short-eared Owls on the Base as well as the only Wilson's Snipe. Also at the Base, Sigrid and Bill Stiles, and Patty Craig had the count's only Brown Pelicans, Black Ducks and Sanderlings. In the Hollywood/Sandgates sector, Kyle Rambo, Sandra Bearden and Amanda Werrell had the count's only Bonaparte's Gull, Winter Wren and Barred Owl. Tom Harten plucked the only Fox Sparrows and Canvasbacks in the St. Leonard sector. David Moulton had the only Phoebe and Horned Larks at Greenwell and Steve Ferrell got the only Catbird at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum.

Record high for Sharp-shinned Hawk with 7 and record lows for Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Brown Creeper, Gray Catbird and Eastern Towhee.

All in all, it was an excellent day for birding in the rain.

**Puttin' on the Ritz
by Jane Klemer**

**Bowl-shaped feeders
Wear fluffy white tophats.
Snowstorm masks reality.**

A Farm Bill at Last

In late January, House and Senate negotiators released a long-awaited Farm Bill agreement designed to extend agriculture programs for the next half decade. While the general media concentrated on the issues of agricultural subsidies and slashes in food stamps, all very important concerns, there was considerably less interest in the conservation issues in the Farm Bill.

The legislation is projected to cost about \$950 billion over the next decade, with an estimated \$60 billion covering core conservation programs.

To many, the Farm Bill had for the past few years represented an example of the dysfunction that is now Washington DC, but what emerged from negotiators offered some optimism for conservation issues, including bird concerns.

A few programs and approaches deserve description here, including conservation compliance, sodsaver, and CRP-related programs.

Conservation compliance will require farmers and ranchers to abide by essential conservation measures in exchange for any federal subsidies for crop insurance on highly erodible land and wetlands. This provision was removed from the Farm Bill 18 years ago, and it is significant that it was re-attached. Landowners can basically do much of what they want on their own lands, but now they can't always ask for federal assistance!

The Farm Bill also included sodsaver, a provision limiting crop insurance subsidies for the first few years in areas where land is newly converted to cropland. This is meant to discourage farmers from tilling 10,000-year-old native grasslands.

Although conservation groups wanted to have the program apply across the nation, the Farm Bill would limit sodsaver to six Northern Great Plains states: Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. The previous Farm Bill had a sodsaver provision that was optional, with state governors having the choice to opt-in. Not one did. This time there is no option. The results should be significant for waterfowl, certain upland gamebirds, and a suite of grassland songbirds that are in serious trouble.

Any expansion of sodsaver to the rest of the country will have to await the next Farm Bill.

Finally for us, other conservation programs - 23 in all - are consolidating into 13 programs, also cutting \$6 billion over the next decade. For example, the well-known Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is reduced from 32 million acres to 24 million acres by FY18. Other similar conservation programs - like WHIP, GRP, and WRP - are part of consolidation, all the while generally honoring the traditions of the efforts and targeted outcomes.

The results aren't perfect, but they are better than many conservationists had expected. "It was worth the wait to get a Farm Bill that will help protect our nation's land, water, and wildlife," said Julie Sibbing, senior director of agriculture and forestry programs for the National Wildlife Federation.

The Farm Bill compromise passed the House of Representatives last month, while awaiting a quick positive vote in the Senate and almost immediate Presidential signing.

Birding Community E-bulletin
Paul J. Baicich
410-992-9736
paul.baicich@verizon.net

You can access past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website: www.refugenet.org/birding/birding5.html

Update: The Farm Bill passed the Senate and President Obama signed it on 2/17.

How Feathers Insulate: How Do Birds Stay Warm When It's So Cold? by Frances Wood

Imagine a Canada Goose paddling along on a cold winter day. Can you guess how many feathers cover this goose? Hundreds? Thousands?

A single Canada Goose has between 20 and 25 thousand feathers. A smaller bird like a sparrow or wren might have 7 to 10 thousand. Those feathers are uniquely designed to help the bird fly, shed water, or display distinctive markings. A great many feathers are the short, fluffy kind, the down, whose purpose is to insulate the bird from the cold.

Birds survive in sub-zero weather by fluffing their feathers, creating layers of air and feathers. Just a fraction of an inch of this insulation can keep a bird's body temperature at 104 degrees, even in freezing weather.

People learned years ago how well goose-down insulates and began stuffing comforters, sleeping bags, and clothing with it. More recently, we've developed artificial substitutes, but geese and other birds continue to get along just fine with the original material.

BirdNote - PO Box 99456 - Seattle, WA 98139

Rusty Blackbird Blitz

Many of you are probably aware of the Rusty Blackbird's precipitous population decline over the last several decades. To others this may be news. We're talking about an 85-95% total population decline since 1970. When you stop to think about that for a minute, it's truly jaw dropping. To make matters worse, the Rusty Blackbird population wasn't in a good place at the onset of this drastic decline. In more than half the state or provincial overviews published before 1920, the Rusty Blackbird was listed as very common or abundant. The same was true in only 19% of the publications between 1920 and 1950. Likewise, the same drastic decline can be seen in publications of the next 50 years (Greenberg and Matsuoka 2010).

Unlike the plight of some other species, like the Bald Eagle, the Rusty Blackbird has suffered in relative obscurity. A much smaller and harder to detect bird, the Rusty Blackbird's decline hasn't generated as much interest in the general public, nor in the birding world for that matter. I have to admit, having started birding well into this population crash, for a long time I was largely unaware of the issue myself and just always knew the Rusty to be a hard bird to find. Those that have been birding for much longer can probably personally attest to this species' increasing scarcity.

The good news is that more and more scientific studies have already taken place or are underway to figure out what's causing this severe downward trend and what can be done to reverse it. Some of the causes already suggested include wintering habitat loss and degradation (particularly of the wooded wetlands in the southeast) and the drying of boreal wetlands caused by climate change on the breeding grounds. High mercury levels and increased competition with Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds have also been cited (Ellison 1990; Erskine 1992).

While we are learning more and more about the Rusty's biology and ecology, there is still a ton of work to be done. This is where we birders can continue to help. The 85-95% statistic mentioned above was derived from Breeding Bird Surveys and Christmas Bird Counts. This is your data in action - proof that what you do can aid in the understanding of birds and influence conservation!

Now, we need your help again. The International Rusty Blackbird Working Group challenges birders to seek Rusty Blackbirds throughout this species' entire migratory range, from the southeastern U.S. through the Northeast, Midwest, Canada, and Alaska. Are there hot spots where many individuals congregate during migration? Are similar migratory stopover areas used by Rusties each year? Are stopover areas protected, or might availability of these areas be limiting Rusty Blackbird survival? These are just some of the questions our data can help answer.

Rusties very soon will begin their northward migration, In Maryland, the Blitz begins March 1st and continues through

April. The Blitz is very easy to help out with and will work entirely through eBird. Starting March 1st, when you go to enter your checklist into eBird, you will see Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz in the Observation Type drop down box (where you would normally select Travelling, Stationary, etc). Please select this option if you go out searching for Rusties, whether you find them or not. Even if you aren't searching for Rusties but find some anyway, please select this Observation Type if you are willing to provide information on sex, number, comments about habitat and behavior. All Rusty Blackbird observations entered into eBird will be captured by the Blitz project, but by selecting this Observation Type, you will be prompted to provide additional critical information.

For additional information on both the Rusty Blackbird and the project itself check out: <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/> We also have a Facebook page up at <http://www.facebook.com/rustyblackbirdspringblitz>

Thanks for reading and I hope you'll give some extra attention to Rusties while you are out eBirding this spring. I'll be posting more information in the near future and will also provide updates on how we're doing as the season progresses. Please feel free to drop me a line if you have a question or comment. Bill Hubick (bill_hubick@yahoo.com) is also helping out and I am sure would be more than happy to answer any questions too.

Thanks,
Rob Ostrowski
rjostrowski@gmail.com
Greenbelt, MD



Rusty Blackbird
Photo by: Bill Hubick

Black Rails by Night
by Bob Sundstrom

As the February moon rises over a Louisiana marsh, a peculiar sound breaks the nocturnal silence. It's the call of a Black Rail, a bird whose voice seems pulled straight from a cartoon soundtrack.

Black Rails are one of a half dozen North American rails, a group of marsh-inhabiting birds more often heard than seen. Just six inches tall, the Black Rail is a puffball, the shape of a barnyard chick. For birdwatchers, seeing a Black Rail is akin to seizing the Holy Grail: Black Rails are not only tiny and dark, but they are secretive and most active at night.

Many Black Rails nest in marshes along the Atlantic seaboard and in the Midwest. But in winter they concentrate in the coastal marshes of East Texas, Louisiana, and Florida; areas that face many threats. US populations of Black Rails have declined greatly.

In recent decades, the enactment of laws protecting wetlands has improved the bird's prospects. Those who support the conservation of wetlands help assure that this shy bird's comical voice will be heard for many years to come.

BirdNote
PO Box 99456

Interesting Internet Links

Dancing Woodcock

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEISiCmjwH8>

Bryan Pfeiffer's essay on the significance of this winter's Snowy Owl irruption:

<http://aeon.co/magazine/nature-and-cosmos/the-snowy-owl-is-a-messenger-from-the-arctic/>

Black Swans Feeding Koi

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=1830995853705995>

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

GBBC 2014 Halftime Report

Thanks to all of you who have been out counting birds! The checklists are rolling in from around the globe and are on pace to surpass last year's record Great Backyard Bird Count. Please continue to submit your checklists to help create a more complete picture of bird populations in your area.

As of mid-morning on Sunday, February 16, (eastern U.S. time zone) we have received checklists from 103 countries, including Australia, China, Argentina, Kazakhstan, Iceland, India, Kenya, and so many more. A sampler of some species and checklist tallies:

Country	Number of Species	Number of Checklists
United States	591	36,000
Canada	216	4,000
Mexico	523	141
Costa Rica	324	31
Argentina	184	27
Kuwait	99	3
Portugal	140	44
Iceland	45	34
Puerto Rico	80	45

Last year participants tallied more than 40% of the world's bird species! Will we reach 50% this year? That may depend on participation in three crucial areas: the forests of Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia. These regions harbor most of the world's bird species and we need reports from those locations. If you have friends or know guides that work in those areas, please get in touch and encourage them to enter their weekend birding tallies to the GBBC!

Although the data are still pouring in, read on to learn about some of the trends we've noted so far.
<http://tinyurl.com/GBBC-halftime-report>

Cornell Lab of Ornithology
159 Sapsucker Woods Road - Ithaca, NY 14850
Call toll-free (800) 843-2473

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.
- Please enroll me as a member of the **National Audubon Society**. My membership will also include membership in the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. I will receive National's *Audubon Magazine*, the chapter newsletter, and support national and local environmental causes. A fraction of my dues will be returned to the local chapter.

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

I DO do NOT wish to receive *The Osprey* electronically. My e-mail address is: _____
(electronic delivery saves SMAS printing and mailing costs.)

Chapter-Only Dues (new/renewal)
Make check payable to Southern Maryland Audubon Society

- Individual/Family __1yr \$20 __2yr \$38 __3yr \$56
- Senior/Student __1yr \$15 __2yr \$28 __3yr \$42
- Individual Lifetime Membership _____\$500
Senior (over 62) _____\$250

National Dues, Make check payable to
National Audubon Society -- Chapter code #C9ZL000Z

- Introductory Offer - 1 year \$20
- Senior/Student \$15

Mail to: Southern Maryland Audubon Society, Attn: Membership
P.O. Box 181 Bryans Road, MD 20616

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 28th – FRIDAY – 7:30 p.m. or

March 1st – SATURDAY – 7:00 p.m.

Field Trip – “Owl Prowl”

Private Farm, Charles County – Youths Welcome!

Rescheduled Date due to Feb 15th Weather Cancellation.

The leader, Mike Callahan, is offering two date options as noted above. Whichever date has the higher number of responses will determine the date. Please respond with your preference to raptorsrulemc@gmail.com. The location will be given upon registration.

Suggested donation of \$5 per person.

March 1 – SATURDAY – 8:00 a.m. – Noon

Field Trip

Patuxent River Naval Air Station, St. Mary’s County

“LATE WINTER LAND BIRDS AND WATERFOWL”

Leader: Dean Newman

(dean.newman@verizon.net, 240-895-7321)

Meet at the Park and Ride lot across the street from the Lexington Park Post Office on Tulagi Place. This trip in the past has produced Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings and Short-eared Owls. Facilities are available. No fee. You must pre-register for this trip in advance due to security requirement.

RSVP required. Call to register.

March 5 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m.

Monthly Meeting Program

La Plata Volunteer Fire Department, Charles County

911 Washington Avenue, La Plata, MD 20646

“GULL I.D.” by Clive Harris, Enthusiastic Guller

“To the Sea, To the Sea! The white gulls are crying” or maybe to the parking lot or dump! Come and enjoy an evening learning how to identify gull species that are expected in our area, both common and rare. Clive will review plumage transition, hybrid combinations, and other approaches in what is one of the most challenging and subjective puzzles in bird identification.

April 2 – WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m.

Monthly Meeting Program

Charlotte Hall Library, St. Mary’s County

37600 New Market Road (Rt. 6 at Rt. 5)

Charlotte Hall, MD 20622

“Butterfly Biology: The Basics of Butterfly Gardening”

by Kerry Wixted, Biologist II, MD DNR Wildlife and Heritage Service

What’s a host plant, and why is Butterfly Bush bad? Learn the answers to these questions as well as the basics of butterfly biology and gardening. Kerry is a native plant enthusiast and runs the Wild Acres backyard wildlife habitat program for MD DNR.

April 13 – SUNDAY – 7:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Field Trip

Indian Head area, Charles County, MD

“Indian Head Rail Trail and Smallwood State Park”

This is a joint trip with the Audubon Naturalist Society.

Leader(s): Carol Ghebelian, 301-753-6754, ghebelian@comcast.net and Lynne Wheeler, comstockel@aol.com)

The Indian Head Rail Trail is one of the best locations for Red-headed Woodpeckers in the state. We will also bird Smallwood State Park, Marbury, MD for early migrants. Come and see the Red-heads and help us find the migrants who are heading north!!

Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Burger King, 3165 Marshall Hall Rd, Bryans Rd, MD 20616.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

David Carlson, Leonardtown
Alan R. Christian, Dunkirk
James Ferris, Lusby
Ken Guarrant, Oxon Hill
Ellen Halbert, Drayden
D. Hansen, Huntingtown
Karen Hoagberg, Accokeek
Ms. Donna McCready, Lusby
John Mason, Hollywood
Patricia Mauche, Lusby
Tim & Carmen Nolte, Chesapeake Beach
Ron Runkles, Mechanicsville
Patricia Sargent, Huntingtown
Carole Schnitzler, Waldorf
Jennifer Smolek, St. Mary’s City
Scarlett Strong, White Plains
Margaret Tieger, Port Tobacco
Barbara Tolson, Temple Hills

**Special Thanks and Welcome to our
new Lifetime Members!**

Gary & June Leyland, Kensington

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 (301-274-5756)