

The Osprey

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society



White-throated Sparrow
Photo by: Bill Hubick

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<http://somdaudubon.org/>

Report From the Board

The following are highlights from the March 28, 2012 board meeting held at the Charlotte Hall library in Charlotte Hall, Maryland.

The board welcomed Dave Curson, Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Maryland-DC. Dave and the SMAS board discussed how to help spearhead proposed conservation work focusing on the Zekiah Swamp Important Bird Area. The need to establish a support group promoting bird and habitat conservation through land advocacy, good forest stewardship on private lands, land use planning and zoning, and bird monitoring was evaluated. SMAS looks forward to helping Dave in this three year project and will likely incorporate this initiative as one of SMAS's top three objectives. Look for future activities regarding the Zekiah Swamp.

Below are highlights from the remainder of the meeting:

- The board reviewed all applicants who were interested in receiving one of our two scholarships to the Audubon camp at Hog Island, Maine "Sharing Nature: Educators Week" workshop. The lucky two educators have been determined. Please read about our decision in this newsletter in an article from our Education Committee Chair Paula Batzer.
- A decision was made regarding the Conservationist of the Year recipient. The award is given at the SMAS annual picnic meeting. This year the event will be held June 3 at the Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Center in Calvert County. Please mark your calendar and join us!
- The board would like to remind all SMAS members to please participate in the upcoming May Count. This year it is Saturday, May 12. Please contact your county coordinator if interested. Your coordinators are listed in the 2011-2012 Program or in this issue's Upcoming Events.
- The board would also like to send out an appeal for members to please contribute to the upcoming June 16 yard sale. This is a great fundraiser for SMAS and special thanks to Will and Julie Daniels for hosting this event.
- Committee chair reports.

The next board meeting will be held at 7 p.m., Wednesday, April 25 at the Charlotte Hall Library. All are welcome. Please migrate on over!

Barn Owl Fledgling
Photo by: George Jett



NOW HATCHING!!
Baby Barn Owls!
Ready for Adoption in Late May!

SMAS Board of Directors Nominations for 2012

We are very pleased to let the members know that the nominees for 2012 SMAS Board of Directors vacancies are:

President – Mike Callahan
Vice-President – Lynne Wheeler
Secretary – Diana Gyurus
Treasurer – Will Daniel
Director – Melissa Boyle
Director – Ernest Willoughby

Nominations will be accepted at the Annual Meeting on June 3.

If there are new nominations, the members present will vote on these positions. If there is only one nominee for each slot it will be asked that the slate be accepted by acclamation. Thanks to all those who accepted the nominations and to all those who continue to serve on the SMAS Board.

Bob Lukinic, Chairman
Nomination Committee

2012 Scholarship Winners

Congratulations to the winners of the 2012 SMAS scholarships to the National Audubon Society's week-long camps on Hog Island Maine.

Hester Burch, an educator at The Elms Environmental Education Center in St. Mary's County, will attend the "Sharing Nature with Children" educator's workshop.

Meagan Keefe, an educator at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center in Charles County, will attend the "Field Ornithology Workshop".

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

James Allen, Mechanicsville
Grace M. Brady, Saint Leonard
Dawn Davit, Fort Washington
Libr P. Dept, St. Mary's City
Shirley Diehlman, Accokeek
Donald Fathke, Lexington Park
Gayanne Graham, La Plata
Bonnie L. Green, Tall Timbers
Susan Holt, Lusby
Miriam Klapka, Tall Timbers
Thomas Scardino, Solomons
Bernice H. Schulz, Waldorf
Fran Sherman, North Beach
Susan Sligh, Waldorf
Michael Svecz, Hollywood
Janice Tyler, Saint Leonard
Jeannette Upchurch, California
Mary Whetstine, Mechanicsville

Managing Forests for the Birds

An innovative program involving Audubon Vermont, foresters, and land managers conserves woodland for the birds.

By Daisy Yuhas

Audubon Magazine: January-February 2012

The Veery singing and flitting through the understory of Vermont's forests may have caught Nancy Patch's ear or eye in the past, but these days when she sees the bird she thinks about how the surrounding habitat is meeting its needs. Patch, a forester with the Vermont Forests, Parks & Recreation Department, credits a novel program called *Foresters for the Birds* with changing her perspective. The three-year-old effort combines Audubon Vermont's bird expertise and land managers' know-how to conserve forests that are important to avian species.

"It's given me a whole new way to look at the forest, and that's speaking as a forester," says Patch, her agency's lead on the project. The forests of Vermont and northern New England boast the continental United States' highest concentration of breeding bird species, including declining neotropical migrants such as the Canada Warbler and the Wood Thrush. The program—developed by Michael Snyder, commissioner of Vermont Forests, Parks & Recreation, and Jim Shallow, Audubon Vermont's conservation and policy director—offers tools and training for foresters to help landowners manage their forests with birds in mind.

For instance, a pocket guide identifies 12 birds representing different habitats with management tips for each: The Chestnut-sided Warbler needs more than an acre of hardwood seedling or sapling stands, with less than 30 percent canopy cover. Patch says the program is particularly popular with landowners who support wildlife but are nervous about cutting trees. *Foresters for the Birds*' practices were recently covered under Vermont's tax incentive program, so landowners can benefit from managing their woods to protect targeted species. Now more than a million acres of private forest—about half the state's forests—are enrolled in the program.

Snyder says the project continues to grow as foresters tailor strategies in the field. "I'm most proud of the real integration of science and experience," he says. Ultimately, he believes, the model could spread throughout the Atlantic Flyway.

Stuff Birders Say

Here's a link to a video that has gone semi-viral, attracting over 41,000 viewers at press time. Despite the name of the video (which I've changed here), there is no profanity and is acceptable for all audiences.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaX7i1Q7-Rw>

Jason Kessler

www.opposablechums.com

**New Research Reveals Crucial Habitat Design Needed for
Endangered Florida Scrub-Jay Survival
The Cornell Lab of Ornithology**

Ithaca, NY—A team of researchers has found a key to the habitat puzzle for improving long-term survival of the endangered Florida Scrub-Jay.

New research published online today in The Royal Society's journal *Biology Letters* shows that clustered habitat networks are needed to maintain the genetic diversity of Florida Scrub-Jays, a species at risk of extinction with just over 5,000 birds left in the world.

The new research reveals, for the first time, a direct connection between genetic variation of Florida Scrub-Jay groups and geographic distances separating patches of their favored scrub-oak habitat. Researchers analyzed DNA samples of Florida Scrub-Jays and evaluated how genetic differences between them were affected by the gaps of habitat in between them. They found that if habitat patches were separated by more than 2 to 3 miles from one another, the distance was too far to permit free interbreeding—thereby resulting in more inbreeding within isolated groups. Inbreeding reduces genetic fitness, and raises the risk that an isolated population will blink out.

"We now know how to configure the stepping stones of scrub-oak habitat so they can link together Florida Scrub-Jay populations and maintain sufficient genetic diversity to promote long-term survival of the species," says Dr. John Fitzpatrick, co-author of the research and executive director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "These research findings will be critical to a revision of the recovery plan for endangered Florida Scrub-Jays."

Fitzpatrick says the findings lay out, for the first time, a precise prescription for sustaining fragmented populations of an endangered species, and could be a model for other examples around the country. For Florida Scrub-Jays, that prescription is to maintain or restore networks of the bird's scrub-oak habitat so that individual preserves would be located within 2 to 3 miles of each other. Fitzpatrick says that because the Florida Scrub-Jay population is broken up into 10 distinct genetic units, these habitat networks would only need to be established locally within the 10 regions of individual populations, not across the bird's entire range in Florida.

"We are now revising the Florida Scrub-Jay Recovery Plan to create the geometry of habitat preserves needed within each of the 10 units of the Florida-Scrub Jay population," says Fitzpatrick, who is also a team leader for the group of government and university biologists working on submitting a revised Florida Scrub-Jay recovery plan to the US Fish and Wildlife Service by year's end.

The Florida Scrub-Jay is the only bird found exclusively in Florida. It was added to the federal Endangered Species List in 1987, with a dwindling population down to less than 10 percent of its pre-settlement numbers. The high, dry, sandy scrub-oak patches where the bird lives and breeds exclusively have been prime real estate for Florida developers and for citrus farms. Today, only about 5 percent of the original scrub-oak habitat remains.

"The pizza is gone," Fitzpatrick says. "We're just trying to save the crumbs, so we can keep the Florida Scrub-Jay and a host of other scrub animals and plants in existence."

Online access to the paper requires a subscription to *Biology Letters*. A .pdf of the paper is available upon request, but cannot be posted online or distributed in any way. To read an abstract of the paper, visit rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org/lookup/doi/10.1098/rsbl.2011.1244.

2012 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.

Calvert County Science and Engineering Expo Judged by Sue Hamilton

Junior Award: Abigail Moller, Northern Middle School
Nathan Scherer, Southern Middle School

Charles County Science Fair Judged by Bob Lukinich and Lynne Wheeler

Elementary Award: Madison Livingston,
Dr. Craik Elementary School

Junior Award: Anna Radtke, Milton Somers Middle School
Varanika Sharma, Mattawoman Middle School

Senior Award: Taylor Stark, Thomas Stone High School

St. Mary's County Science and Engineering Fair Judged by Will Daniels and Bev Walker

Junior Award: Alyssa Brookhart,
Spring Ridge Middle School

All winners were presented with certificates of award. Junior and senior division winners received one-year memberships in the National Audubon Society and Southern Maryland Audubon Society as well as a cash award.

WANTED

Individual or Couple to run our SMAS Bookstore. You would be responsible for ordering and maintaining inventory. Taking some of the inventory to our monthly meeting and occasionally setting up a display and selling items at community events. Attendance at monthly Board of Directors meeting is encouraged. Send monthly sales report to President.

If you are interested in this volunteer position please contact President Mike Callahan at raptorsrule@juno.com or at 240-765-5192

Great Backyard Bird Count

In an Unusual Winter--Where and Why Birds Traveled
Insights from record-breaking Great Backyard Bird Count

#

March 21, 2012—When bird watchers joined this year's Great Backyard Bird Count, they recorded the most unusual winter for birds in the count's 15-year history. With 17.4 million bird observations on 104,000 checklists, this was the most detailed four-day snapshot ever recorded for birdlife in the U.S. and Canada. Participants reported 623 species, during February 17–20, including an influx of Snowy Owls from the arctic, early-migrating Sandhill Cranes, and Belted Kingfishers in northern areas that might normally be frozen over.

"The maps on the GBBC website this year are absolutely stunning," said John Fitzpatrick, executive director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Every bird species has a captivating story to tell, and we're certainly seeing many of them in larger numbers farther north than usual, no doubt because of this winter's record-breaking mild conditions."

Ironically, a few arctic species also moved farther south than usual as well. Participants recorded Snowy Owl sightings in record-breaking numbers throughout the Great Plains and Pacific Northwest of the United States. Canadian bird watchers saw four times the number of Snowy Owls they reported to the count last year. Experts believe that Snowy Owls move south from their usual arctic habitats in years when prey, such as lemmings, are scarce.

Warmer weather and lack of snow and ice in some regions set the stage for other spectacles, including more than two million Snow Geese reported on two counts at Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Missouri. In Ruskin, Florida, participants reported more than one million Tree Swallows, vaulting this species to the GBBC top-ten list of the most numerous birds for the first time ever.

Some northern locations recorded high numbers of waterbirds such as Mallards, Ring-necked Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, and American Coots, that either never left or came back early to lakes, rivers, and ponds that remained unfrozen.

"Citizen scientists are helping us document changes to birds, starting in our own backyards, which is also where the solution begins," said Audubon chief scientist Gary Langham. "My preschool-age daughter came out with me to count birds in the yard and around the neighborhood--we're still talking about the experience weeks later."

To find out more about these and other trends from the 2012 count, visit www.birdcount.org. To report bird sightings all year, visit www.ebird.org.

The GBBC is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada. The event is sponsored in part by Wild Birds Unlimited.

Top 10 birds reported on the most checklists in the 2012 GBBC:

- 1) Northern Cardinal
- 2) Mourning Dove
- 3) Dark-eyed Junco
- 4) Downy Woodpecker
- 5) American Crow
- 6) House Finch
- 7) American Goldfinch
- 8) Blue Jay
- 9) Black-capped Chickadee
- 10) Tufted Titmouse

Media Note: Visit the "Explore the Results" pages on the GBBC web site at www.birdcount.org to find the list of Top 10 birds reported in your state, province, or city.

Contacts:

Pat Leonard, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, (607) 254-2137, pe127@cornell.edu
Delta Willis, Audubon, (212) 979-3197, dwillis@audubon.org
Kerrie Wilcox, Bird Studies Canada, (888) 448-2473, kwilcox@bsc-eoc.org

Roman Jesien

New Sand will Nourish Skimmer Island

<http://www.delmarvanow.com/article/20120326/OPINION/203260318>

Skimmer Island in Ocean City is unarguably the most important barren sand nesting habitat for colonial nesting waterbirds in Maryland. It lies just north of the Route 50 bridge (on the lefthand side going into Ocean City).

Since the early 1990s, it has been the site of Maryland's only Royal Tern colony and has been of critical importance to breeding Black Skimmers as well. Both birds are on the state's endangered list.

The island is also important to nesting Common Terns, American Oystercatcher and Great Black-backed Gulls. A few years ago, a heronry also was developed on the most stable portion of the island that has seen vegetation growth.

In addition, Skimmer Island is the most important site for horseshoe crab nesting in Maryland.

The island formed in the late 1980s with the reinforcement of the Route 50 bridge. By 1998, Skimmer Island was approximately seven acres in size, and had become a popular clamming area.

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However, since then it has started to erode. By 2009, it had decreased to 2.3 acres. As of autumn 2010, it was down to about 2.1 acres. Skimmer Island was in serious trouble.

Last year, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources began a cooperative public-private project to nourish Skimmer Island with clean sand dredged from the approach channel to the Ocean City Fishing Center. A total of 650 cubic yards were put onto the island last year. Sand placement will continue this year.

This effort is primarily funded by the Ocean City Fishing Center, with minimal funding from DNR and the Maryland Coastal Bays Program which covers staff time to prepare permits, reports and monitor the project. Others involved in the project include Worcester County, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Maryland Department of the Environment.

This highly beneficial “win-win” project would not be happening without the support of the Fishing Center.

Sand placement will start this week and needs to be completed April 1 to meet restrictions on in-water work to protect summer flounder, which will be entering the coastal bays shortly after.

The contractor's first task on the project will be placing turbidity curtains and constructing a pipe to hydraulically move the material from the dredging site to Skimmer Island. Then they will begin pumping clean sand to Skimmer Island. There will be a small excavator on Skimmer Island grading the sand to final elevations designed to provide safe naturally maintaining nesting habitat for royal terns and black skimmers.

The key to natural maintenance of the nesting habitat is careful control of elevation, so nesting sites are safe from most summer storm tides, but exposed to winter storm overwash to set back vegetative succession with physical reworking and/or salt deposition in the sand from overwashing salt water.

When first placed, the material will be gray, perhaps even sometimes close to black. However, in a matter of a few days that material will lighten and will become indistinguishable from the sands of Skimmer Island. The sand is the same as that placed at Homer Gudelsky County Park, just south of the Route 50 bridge at the eastern end of Old Bridge Road in West Ocean City.

To get an idea of what the placed sand will look like, check out the park. This project is basically an effort to “design with nature” and once all work is done, there will be little or no visible sign that anything happened to Skimmer Island, other than over the winter, some additional sand accreted to the island.

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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, \$25 for each Barn Owl, or \$35 for each American Kestrel to:

Melissa Boyle
10455 Point Lookout Road
Scotland, MD 20687



ADOPT A RAPTOR

Name: _____

Address: _____

I wish to adopt (check one):

_____ (# of) Osprey, \$10.00 each

_____ (# of) Barn Owl, \$25.00 each

_____ (# of) American Kestrel, \$35.00 each

Amount Enclosed: _____

Make checks payable to:
Southern Maryland Audubon Society

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 21– Saturday – half day – Field Trip
Jug Bay area, Prince George's County

"BIRDING HOTSPOTS ALONG THE PATUXENT RIVER"

Leader: Fred Shaffer (410-721-1744, glaucousgull@verizon.net).

This mid-spring trip will visit several parks along the Patuxent River in southern Prince George's County in search of migrant sparrows and waterfowl, as well as other birds in the fields and forests lining the Patuxent River. Possible stops include Jug Bay, Milltown Landing, and Aquasco Farms. Meet at Mt. Calvert Park at 8:10 AM to begin the trip. Contact Fred Shaffer at 410-721-1744 for additional information.

MAY 2 – WEDNESDAY – 6:45 p.m. (field trip); 8:00 (lecture)

Hard Bargain Farm, 2301 Bryan Point Road, Accokeek, Prince George's County and Faith United Methodist Church, 15769 Livingston Road, Accokeek "Living Shoreline at Piscataway Park"

KAREN JENSEN MILES, Program Director, Alice Ferguson Foundation
With several factors causing increased erosion along the Potomac River shoreline, a stabilized "Living Shoreline" was constructed in 2010. Funded by NOAA through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the project restored 2,800 feet of shoreline. Come walk along the Potomac River to see how this project is monitored, and observe the many flora and fauna and bird species. Enjoy a great view of Mount Vernon against the magical sunset. Meet at 6:45 p.m. at the Hard Bargain Farm parking lot to carpool to the shore. After our one hour walk we will return to the parking lot and drive to the Faith United Methodist Church for Q&A and refreshments, estimate time 8:00. This is a special treat for SMAS. Feel free to meet us wherever you can. (In case of rain, meet at 7:30 at the church)

May 5 – Saturday – 8 AM - noon – Field Trip

Battle Creek Cypress Swamp, Calvert County

"BARRED OWLS AND PROTHONOTARY WARBLERS"

Leader: Andy Brown (410-535-5327, brownaj@co.cal.md.us)

Target species include Prothonotary, Hooded and Kentucky Warblers, as well as other notable spring migrants. Particular emphasis will be on identification by song. From Prince Frederick, Rt. 2/4, 2 miles, right onto Sixes Rd. 2 miles, left onto Gray's Rd. Nature Center entrance on the right. Facilities, no fee. RSVP required.

May 12 – Saturday - All Day

COUNTY MAY COUNTS

Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, St. Mary's Counties

Help needed from all: backyard birders, beginners, team leaders. Data and information help save our birds! County coordinators are as follows:
Calvert: Sue Hamilton (410-586-1494, seal10n2002@yahoo.com);
Charles: George Jett (301-843-3524, gmjett@comcast.net);
Prince George's: Fred Fallon (301-249-1518, fwallon@earthlink.net);
St. Mary's: Patty Craig (301-872-5670), eyrie@hughes.net.
See the May issue of The Osprey or the SMAS website for additional information.

May 18, 19, 20 – Friday, Saturday & Sunday – Field Trip

Delaware Bay

"MIGRATING SHOREBIRDS & SPAWNING HORSESHOE CRABS" – CANCELLED!!!

Leader: Millie Kriemelmeyer (301-372-8766, milliek@radix.net).

May 26 – Saturday – 8 A.M. – noon – Field Trip

Smallwood State Park, Charles County Youths especially welcome!

2750 Sweden Point Road, Marbury, MD 20658

"MULTI-HABITAT BIRDING"

Leaders: Lynne Wheeler (301-751-8097, fidsruschic@aol.com) and Jean Artes. This is one of our favorite parks as it has such a wonderful varied habitat. The walk will offer you forest interior dwelling species, field/meadow species, raptors, wading birds, shorebirds, and gulls. Previous trips have revealed Prothonotary, Hooded and Kentucky Warblers. No reservation required, so you can make a last minute decision! The park meeting location will be posted at the entrance gate. A \$3 vehicle fee is required. From Rt. 225(Hawthorne Rd)/Rt. 224 (Chicamuxen Rd) intersection take Rt. 224 approx. 3 miles to park entrance on right.

Barn Owls & Breakfast, Charles County Youths especially welcome!
Mid-May to early June, Sunday morning, To be determined. See The Osprey and SMAS

website for date selected

Leader: Mike Callahan (240-765-5192, raptorsrule@juno.com).

Join our Raptor Conservation Committee Chairman Mike Callahan for a new version of B&B. Trip participants will enjoy breakfast before we check a Barn Owl nest box and possibly band the nestling owls. This trip will take place on private property, so the location is not advertised. There is a \$3 fee to help cover the cost of food. Bring your own reusable plate, mug and utensils to help make this a "greener" trip. Sign up with Mike at 240-765-5192 so food can be ordered. Limited space available and you will be notified of meeting location upon sign up. RSVP required.

JUNE 3 – SUNDAY – 1:30 p.m.

Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Center, Calvert County

Gray's Road off of Sixes Road (Rt. 506), Prince Frederick, MD

ANNUAL MEETING

Potluck Lunch.....1:30 – 3:00

Host's Briefing3:00 – 3:30

Business Meeting3:30 – 4:00

Bird Walk4:00 – 5:00

Bring your family, friends, and favorite food dish and join us at this 100-acre nature sanctuary renowned for its primeval beauty. On the quarter-mile boardwalk trail gaze up at the 100-foot canopy of cypress trees and listen to nature's harmony of frogs calling and birds singing. Call 410-535-5327 for directions and additional information or visit www.calvertparks.org

June 29 – Wednesday – 10:00 a.m. - ?? – Field Trip

Osprey Banding Field Trip, Prince George's & Anne Arundel County

Leader: Greg Kearns

This is a great opportunity to see fledgling Osprey, up close and personal, with Naturalist Greg Kearns, who has been banding these birds on the Patuxent for more than 25 years!

We will meet at Patuxent River Park (directions provided after registration) by 10 a.m. We will be going out on a boat on the Patuxent to help with banding osprey chicks. Bring a lunch, water, camera, hat, and sunscreen.

Contact Melissa Boyle (melissaboyle3@gmail.com) to sign up. Spaces are limited. Reservations taken on a first come, first-served basis. Ages 12-Adult. \$6 perperson fee, cash payable day of trip.

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.