

The Osprey



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Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

MONITORING AVIAN PRODUCTIVITY AND SURVIVORSHIP, EXPERIENCES AT "MAPS" STATIONS

By Bob Boxwell

It was 1992 when I first interned with the Institute for Bird Populations (IBP). The program is called Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS). The idea then was establish bird banding stations across the country to try to determine why the downward trend in migrant bird populations was occurring. I came in on the second year for the Navy stations comprising Patuxent River, Indian Head, and Dahlgren.

The MAPS banding stations I have worked on have been located primarily in the woods, near water, each with at least ten mist nets. The nets are scattered throughout the station and the operator walks a path between them every forty or fifty minutes. Each net is of a fine mesh (like the cafeteria lady's hairnet), which is stretched along lanes where the birds are likely to fly. If a bird flies into the net, it gets wrapped in the mesh and hangs there until the operator untangles the bird, and puts it in a bag. Once a "run" is completed, the operator processes the birds taken from the nets. Processing consists of placing a band on the bird's leg and recording the serial number, the bird's age class (juvenile, immature, adult), sex, breeding condition, amount of subcutaneous fat, whether molting, and length of wing. From year to year one might also be asked to collect feathers or other data for some long term study.

I continued to work for IBP off and on for the next seven years and have banded birds at Patuxent River nearly every year since I started. This year they wanted me to run the stations, which is a lot of work for someone already fully employed. Fortunately the summer teaching load was very light this year and I was able to schedule my summer to fit the banding program requirements.

One of the joys of working outdoors is seeing the season progress in some detail. The flowers, trees, frogs, turtles, flies, ticks, spiders, and birds all come out for your enjoyment. This year was particularly trying for ticks. Some days I picked dozens off in the field and another batch once I got home. The flies are a nuisance, but since I have bug spray and don't use it, they can't be all that bad. Not that I dislike insects, it's been a great year for blue bodied damselflies. I encountered them every time I was near running water. They are lovely and closely accompanied me whenever I waded the stream between two nets at one station.

Maybe my least favorite part of the day is opening the station. Acquiring a face full of spider webs before having to unravel each ten-meter-long net is very annoying (and I like spiders, just not in my hair or face). The rest of the day is making net runs and processing birds, until six hours after setting up. Then I get to close the nets. After spending six hours in the field, I am more than ready to just close the nets and get out of the heat and humidity and into the AC. For some perverse reason, this year I got birds on the last run, seventeen of nineteen days.

Processing the birds is the major part of the training and skills involved in banding. Setting up the nets, taking them down, and extracting birds requires some skills (and a lot of patience), but it doesn't tax your brain. Understanding what exactly the authors of the bird banding manual meant often taxes my brain. Subtle contrasts in color, wear, and whether a feather is truncate or tapered often are the clues used to age a bird. Some birds give you lovely and often obvious clues. The black in the beak of a cardinal, the lack of barring on under tail coverts of the Carolina wren, the yellow inner bill of the titmouse, are all easy ways to identify a juvenile. And of course the fluffy juvenile feathers are usually the best clue of all.

Lots of subtle details not always noticeable in the field are very obvious in hand. The rusty patch under the catbirds tail is one detail I never noticed until I handled the birds. The details on a blue jay are wonderful to see in the field, but even more special in hand. The sheer energy of our small resident birds is amazing. So much action and motion from titmice, wrens, and chickadees, you'd think you had a bird twice its size. Surprisingly some of the big birds are fairly docile in the hand.



An adult Tufted Titmouse (like one of "the gang"), photo by George Jett.

Speaking of titmice, they have been the most active of the birds this year. Always feisty in the net or in hand, this year a batch of juvenile birds ran wild on me. My first encounter with this group was at net one on the upland station. I could hear the bird screaming as I approached the net. Apparently so could about a dozen other birds all ranting and scolding as I worked on extracting the first titmouse. I felt a thud, then another. Two more titmice had joined the two already entangled. A chickadee buzzed the net, but pulled back just in time. Ten minutes later I finally got the fifth bird out of the net and went on to finish the run. The five birds from that net comprised four juveniles, and an adult male. Two days later the gang shows up again at the other upland station. This time they had already lured a wren, a hairy woodpecker, and a red-eyed vireo into the net. Seven birds! Yikes! I only had five bags. Naturally the next net had two more birds. By the time I was done processing these guys, it was already ten minutes past closing time. This did make my best showing at this station, with 17 birds total for the day.

That number of birds makes for a long day. If you are really good you can process a bird in two minutes. My time is more like three or four. But this year we were sampling for UCLA on a study looking into avian flu. The MAPS stations were taking cloacal swabs and pulling tail feathers for each bird caught. Since the nasty version has not shown up in this country and it seems to prefer fowl, we are not at any great risk. And they give us hand disinfectant to use. The trouble is not so much the collecting of the data, as the recording of it. You have to label the tube, then write the date, band number, species, label number, breeding condition, age, and station for each bird. Now pull the feathers, stuff them in an envelope and record the date, species, band number, location, age, sex, and breeding condition. All this is in the less than ideal lab conditions often encountered outdoors. I have trouble enough keeping track of my tools, much less labels on a mini-test tube.

The heat, humidity, and bugs conspired to make the day difficult, but I know the real issue is my age. It was fifteen years ago when I first worked these stations and the trails haven't got any better. Between wading streams, ascending and descending hills, ducking under several downed trees, climbing over others and along top of a couple, each net run was a good thirty minute workout. One or two workouts a day are good for you. Six or seven are excessive. Yet where else would I have the opportunity to hold a hummingbird? Examine a cuckoo up close and personal? Or be bitten by a cardinal, confronted by a raccoon, pecked by a titmouse, drummed on by a woodpecker, and defecated on by more birds than I can recall? But I do love watching nature. This way three days out of every ten I'm guaranteed a natural experience and a full body workout.

SIERRA CLUB INVITES ALL TO VIEW AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

The Sierra Club, Southern Maryland Group sponsors a free showing of "An Inconvenient Truth" at the County Government Building Auditorium in La Plata. Showing will be on September 28 at 7:00 pm. Doors open at 6:30 pm. There will be light refreshments and door prizes. This film features Al Gore's slide show about ongoing worldwide climate changes owing to the "greenhouse effect." This film shows how accelerating climate change is affecting our earth today and how it may affect it in the future, unless society acts quickly to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Those who are skeptical of all or part of the film's subject matter are especially encouraged to see it. Chester and Donna Joy from Climate Project will be present. They are familiar with and can objectively discuss the scientific issues and rationales for all views of the climate controversy. They will host a question and answer session for those who would like to join in.

For more information, contact Donna Cave,
DonnaCave@aol.com or telephone 301 932-7249.

DID YOU GET YOUR "WAKE UP CALL"?

by Gwen Brewer

In this month's newsletter, our Chapter Only Members are receiving an "extra"- the insert "2007 State of the Birds Report" from the July-August Audubon magazine. These inserts were made available to Audubon chapters at a very reasonable price and we believe that the 500 copies that we purchased will be very useful for our conservation and education efforts. For those of you who received this insert in early summer with your Audubon magazine, it's time to pull it back out and have a look. Are you surprised by the facts? Worried about our common birds? It is indeed staggering to realize the magnitude of loss that long-term survey efforts such as the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey have documented for the 10 common species selected for this report. Southern Maryland hosts breeding populations of four of these species (Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Meadowlark, Field Sparrow, and Grasshopper Sparrow) and three other species are found here regularly during migration or winter (Northern Pintail, Greater Scaup, and Common Tern).

In our area, loss of habitat owing to development and to changes in farming practices has certainly contributed to declines for the four southern Maryland breeding bird species. Other threats cited for the 10 listed species include global warming, contaminants, invasive species, and loss of forested and wetland habitats. What can we do about

this? Fortunately, the article includes a section with some ideas on how we can assist these and other bird species. Heed your wakeup call and act on these suggestions. There are many ways that you can help, including participation in SMAS bird counts and education and outreach efforts. Let's continue to work together to improve the state of the birds in 2007 and beyond!

BIRDING BY ELDERHOSTEL*

by Sue Hamilton

Although I had met many groups of Elderhostellers participating in programs at the Calvert Marine Museum where I worked, I had not participated in a program myself. My first choice was titled 'Hummingbird Hotspots', based in Sierra Vista, in southern Arizona. On Sunday, April 29th, after what seemed to be an uneventful flight to Tucson, I was glad to get to Sierra Vista, but to my horror I discovered I had lost my binoculars.

Luckily for me, our leader had extra binoculars to lend me. There were 23 of us, with three guides and three vans. After an early breakfast Monday, we were all loaded up for a short trip to Fort Huachuca, to some exciting habitats. This military reservation gives access to the Huachuca Mountains. It was hard to pass up the various flycatchers on our way up to the picnic spot. I was also delighting in seeing the red-blooming cactus-like Ocotillo plant and the Cholla cactuses. We all got good views of Dusky-capped Flycatchers, and were able to compare Cassin's Kingbird with Western Kingbird. When we finally arrived at the picnic area, almost everyone headed for the latrine, but a sudden excited murmuring by the stream led me to give up my place in line, and race over in time to gaze at a noisy pair of Elegant Trogons who were interested in a hole in one of the big sycamores by the creek. Western Pewees were noisy and conspicuous, so we learned them well.

After lunch we headed for a bed-and-breakfast property in nearby Patagonia, which was laced with hummingbird feeders. For the first time I heard the loud buzzing of the Broad-billed Hummingbird. A number of benches and chairs were set up for the use of visitors, so down we sat for a fascinating show. Black-chinned Hummingbirds were common, but they made the Magnificent Hummingbirds look huge. There were also Blue-throated Hummingbirds, but the tiny Calliope Hummingbird, with its red gorget, was my favorite.

The next day we visited another property that attracts lots of birds and welcomes guests, this time in the Chiricahua Mountains. I wasn't quite as excited about the Yellow-breasted Chat coming to the fruit feeder as the westerners

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FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED



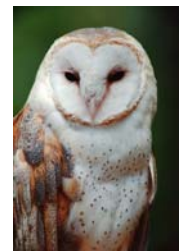
Southern Maryland Audubon Society sponsors the banding of nestling birds of prey, or raptors, with serially numbered aluminum bands in cooperation with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U. S. Department of the Interior, as part of our bird research and conservation activities in Southern Maryland. Limited 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, or \$25 for each Barn Owl to:

Southern Maryland Audubon Society
ATTN: Adoption Program
11350 Budds Creek Rd.
Charlotte Hall, Maryland 20622



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)

were, but I really loved the Lazuli Buntings! Overhead a Zone-tailed Hawk glided, exhibiting its likeness to a Turkey Vulture.

At another location suet feeders brought Arizona Woodpeckers, Gila Woodpeckers and noisy Mexican Jays into view.

Higher up the mountain, near the Patagonia rest stop, we parked the van and watched a circling Gray Hawk high overhead. Then we split up, one group going to the “birdier” place by the stream, while my group headed up the mountain road. An Ash-throated Flycatcher reminded me of our Great Crested. A Thick-billed Kingbird was an exciting find, since its range barely makes it into this area of southern Arizona. The ‘lucky’ group abandoned the stream and came to see the Kingbird. On the hike back I got good looks at a pair of Hepatic Tanagers.

One evening we went owling: this consisted of driving to a place where an Elf Owl lived in a snag. We were able to see the little owl in her hole, and to see her fly out a little after dark. Her mate was waiting in a nearby tree, so we reluctantly left them to feed their young.

Thursday was to be our most strenuous day. It was also the first time we’d hiked far at high altitude. We headed back to the Huachucas, to climb Sawmill Canyon. We were at about 10,000 feet. I was confident – shall I say cocky?—that I could stay with the leaders. Well, I did, as we managed to find Grace’s Warbler and Yellow-eyed Juncos. However, as we turned and started down the mountain, I began to realize that my legs felt like rubber. At lunch, when our leaders asked who was going on the steep hike up to see some reported Spotted Owls in Scheelite Canyon, I miserably kept my hand down. My cohorts explained to me that my muscles were showing oxygen deprivation from the altitude.

The easy alternative was Ramsey Canyon. It was gorgeous. After we spent a few more minutes absorbing the array of hummingbirds at the nature center’s feeders, our guide gathered us for a hike up the canyon. I only made it to the first bench, where I sorrowfully watched the others hike up to look for trogons. After they left, I noticed that a Painted Redstart was gleaning insects at the base of a nearby tree, and a Western Tanager was practically sitting on my head. I took out my little digital camera and actually got a decent photo of the cooperative bird! This was pretty nice as a consolation prize. After a few more happy minutes, I heard a sound not unlike a cuckoo. Could it be? A male Elegant Trogon came into view and sang as I gazed at his moving throat. I turned suddenly, and found that I had disturbed the female, who promptly flew off. The seven stalwarts who hiked up the canyon never saw the trogons, but they did see the spotted owls.

Friday took us high up Carr Canyon, also in the Huachucas, where there were some fantastic vistas and beautiful pine-oak woodlands. The Olive Warbler was #500 for my life list.

I was surprised at how much this program resembled a straight birding trip. I saw about thirty life birds, at a rate that almost made my head swim. The people I met were interesting, and we shared a number of interests. Our leaders were versed in local history, geology, and botany, so they were able to answer my many questions about this exciting environment.

“Elderhostel is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing extraordinary learning adventures for people 55 and over.” —from their website, [www. Elderhostel.org](http://www.Elderhostel.org), Telephone 1-800-454-5768 to request a free catalog.

MY WEEK IN PARADISE!

by Beth Wisotzky

Everyone has a different definition of paradise. I, being 24 years old, many would think mine would involve an island covered in palm trees, cloudless days, white-sand beaches, and sipping wine with my lobster dinner. Well, don’t get me wrong, that definitely describes my ideal paradise, but luckily, I have many definitions of the word. One of those became reality when I spent a week at National Audubon Society’s Workshop for Educators Camp on Hog Island in the gorgeous Muscongus Bay off the coast of Damariscotta, Maine.

From the time we arrived to the moment we departed, we campers were treated with courtesy and the utmost of hospitality. The accommodations included two cabin-like buildings that were rustic but a welcome change from what we were all used to. The food was definitely the opposite of rustic, but also something many of us weren’t used to. Meals were prepared by their camp chef from scratch, often using fresh ingredients from local farmers. Each meal was healthy, filling, and incredibly tasty; especially the lobster dinner we were able to partake in on the last evening of camp.

Not only were the accommodations and meals spectacular, but the learning and growing that occurred was also amazing. Even though I was the youngest camper there, I never felt that was a hindrance because everyone was learning along with me. Each evening, our schedule for the next day was explained for us, from the early morning bird walks at 6am until the evening ‘lectures’ (featuring a superb array of guest speakers) at 8pm. Being a hobbyist birder, I got myself up each chilly morning (mornings there were in the 50s F) in order to add more species to my life list. The guest speakers combined with the camp staff had so much knowledge to divulge to us, I am thankful for the handouts

OCTOBER EVENTS

October 3—**Wednesday**—7:30 PM. **Monthly Meeting** Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Nature Center, Gray's Road off Sixes Road, Prince Frederick, Calvert County. "**The Patuxent River**" by Fred Tutman, Patuxent Riverkeeper. Explore the Patuxent River with Riverkeeper Fred Tutman and get insights on the science, the folklore, the history, and the ecology of the river. See Riverkeeper volunteers at work in the watershed, with examples of some of the specific policies and issues he takes on. Learn about other Riverkeeper organizations in our region and around the world.

October 7—**Sunday**—9:00 AM to noon. **Field Trip** Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area, Charles County. **Birding for All Ages and Levels.** Leader: Fred Burggraf, 301-934-8042, fburggraf@aol.com. This half-day trip with Myrtle Grove's most experienced birder will look for late songbird migrants, hawks, woodpeckers, and sparrows. From Rte. 301 in La Plata, take Rte. 225 west about 4.5 miles to the WMA on the right. From Rte. 210 take Rte. 225 east about 4 miles to the WMA. Follow the dirt road to the end (about a mile) and meet in the parking lot near the lake. No fee, no facilities.

October 21—**Sunday**—9:00 AM to noon. **Field Trip** Myrtle Point, St. Mary's County. **YOUTH TRIP, Fall Youth Birding.** Leader: Bob Boxwell, 410-394-1300, bobboxwell@hotmail.com. Diverse habitat should make for an interesting morning. From Calvert County, take Rte.

4 across the Thomas Johnson Bridge and turn right onto Patuxent Blvd. About 2.25 miles west of the bridge. From St. Mary's County take Rte. 4 toward Solomons and turn left onto Patuxent Blvd. Follow to the end and meet in the parking lot on the left. No fee, no facilities.

October 31—**Wednesday**—7:00 PM. **Board of Directors Meeting** Calvert County Library, Prince Frederick. Board of Directors meetings are open to any member.

November 3—**Saturday**—8:00 AM to 2:00 PM. **Field Trip** St. Mary's County Waterfowl Hotspots. **The Changing Birding Season.** Leader: Tyler Bell, 301-862-4623, jtylerbell@yahoo.com. Search for late fall and early winter specialties in a very productive area. Meet the group at the Wildwood Shopping Center in front of Paintin' Place. From Rte. 235 at Rte. 4 go north to the next light. Turn left, then immediately right into the shopping center. Paintin' Place is on the left. Scopes are useful. Facilities, but no fee except at Point Lookout. RSVP required.

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The deadline for the Osprey is the fifth of each month. Please send all short articles, reports, unique sightings, conservation updates, calendar items, etc. to the above address.

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SOLOMONS
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