

The Osprey



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www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

POINT LOOKOUT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

by Bob Boxwell, coordinator/compiler

With less than ideal weather facing us the morning of December 21st, I wasn't particularly optimistic about what we'd find for this year's bird counts. Waterfowl once again had been scare down in these waters and the rain and wind probably weren't going to help matters. We did catch a break by late morning and the remainder of the day was a bit dryer.

When the results came in they were better than I anticipated. We ended up with a total of 102 species and over 17,500 individuals. Highlights included two firsts for the count both turned in by the folks from St. Mary's City, Crackling Goose and two White-eyed Vireos. The goose is a rare find in this part of the world, the vireo is pretty common in warm weather (and this time of year is totally out of place). Another rare bird for here although its timing is OK is (as my brother Dave would say) the ironically named Common Merganser. It is anything but common around here although ten miles up the Patuxent it can be found with some regularity.

In general, waterfowl numbers were no worse than previous years and in some cases as with the scoters, goldeneyes and Bufflehead, marginally better. Still we do not get the huge mixed flocks that use to number in the thousands down at the fishing pier off Point Lookout. Oh for the days of chattering teeth and icy fingers while scoping the choppy water for eiders or Harlequin Ducks. It was good to get a few puddle ducks as well with Gadwall, Pintail, and Green-winged Teal on the list.

Taking a closer look at the numbers we saw the largest number of Canada geese (over 4,000) this century. Tundra and Mute Swan numbers continued lower (29 and 69) than average, but not the lowest this decade. Looking at our ducks we found the largest number of Canvasback this century (drum round). Unfortunately that number was 47. Historically in the previous century this distinct profile could be seen in the thousands. Both scaup species continue to be scarce with a tiny combined count of 45 birds. Common Goldeneye was up from previous years to 206, but this is low for earlier this decade when we could expect flocks totaling around 400. Buffleheads remain reliable with 670 individuals in many locations.

Ebbs and flows in land bird populations this decade are interesting as well. The American Robin has been declining gradually the past five years coming in at 157 their lowest

number this decade. Their cousins the Eastern Bluebird are rebounded from a low of 41 in 2004 back to 284 (seven short of the record in 2001). And while we are at it lets look at a competitor for the bluebirds, the House Sparrow. We did have the highest number this century with 179 birds, but these numbers are nothing compared to the first decade (1970's) of this count when 191 was the lowest figure.

A species we usually get but missed this time was Eastern Screech Owl. I guess the morning weather wasn't that inviting. It improved enough that we had a Great horned Owl fly into the parking circle at the tally rally around 5:30 that evening. This is my kind of owling, from the comfort of your living room.

I thank all the people who went out and did the hard work of finding all our birds. Please come back and join us for 2009. Thanks to my parents for proving the location for our tally rally once again. And everybody's special thanks go to my wife, Joanne, for another delicious spaghetti and meatball dinner. Maybe that's what keeps them coming back.

POTOMAC RIVER CLEANUP CALLS FOR VOLUNTEERS

by Bob Lukinic

It is nearly that time of the year for the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup. This year's cleanup will be on April 4th from 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon, rain or shine.

The site at Marshall Hall Park is again sponsored by our Southern Maryland Audubon Society. SMAS will furnish drinks and snacks. Representatives will be at the sign-in table and through the park to help with whatever is needed. Gloves and trash bags are furnished through the Alice Ferguson Foundation and Charles County Public Works.

In previous years, many volunteers participated in the cleanup including: students working on their community service requirements, scout troops, church groups, and businesses, as well as residents of all ages interested in the environment in which we live. Every year after the volunteers are done there is such a great difference in the appearance, safety, and usefulness of the shoreline. SMAS hopes that concerned residents will again show up to help heal the Potomac.

If you want further information please contact me, Site Coordinator Bob Lukinic
Phone 301-283-6317
E-mail rlukinic@peoplepc.com

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Barrow's Goldeneye at Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum, by Tyler Bell.

On Saturday, February 7, 2009, my wife, Jane Kostenko, and I were conducting the 11th annual waterfowl survey of the Patuxent River sponsored by the Jug Bay Sanctuary. We have six count points including four within the JPPM property. The first is at Peterson Point, the second at the old Academy of Natural Sciences pier, third at King's Reach and the fourth at the end of the gravel road on the north side of the park.

Jane was sitting in the car doing paperwork while I started counting ducks at the old Academy pier site. There is usually a large flock of scaup there though over the years, due to the Great Lakes failure to freeze and other factors, many ducks aren't migrating into the Chesapeake Bay area anymore. As I scanned through the scaup, I came across a drake Barrow's Goldeneye. Common Goldeneyes are fairly common on the Patuxent along the JPPM stretch of the river but this was the first record of Barrow's Goldeneye for Calvert County. There was a drake Barrow's Goldeneye at Pax River NAS for three years and he was actually counted on the first waterfowl survey back in 1999. Clearly this is a new bird for the JPPM bird list!

As an aside, back in 1997, when I was still fleshing out the bird list for JPPM, I knew that Ring-necked Duck was missing and should be an easy bird. In retrospect, I know that they're easy to find in the pond on the north edge of the park in late winter and early spring. Anyway, I went down to the Academy pier and set up my scope. I scanned the river with binoculars and saw a duck with a dark back, good ID mark for Ring-necked Duck. When I put the scope on it, it had a long plume hanging down the back of its neck: Tufted Duck! This was the second record of Tufted Duck in Maryland and again a first for Calvert County.

So, Tufted Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye at the exact same spot. Pretty sweet, eh?! Well, to add to that, back in May 2005, the Maryland Ornithological Society held their annual conference in Solomons. Kathy Lambert, while scouting JPPM for a trip there, located an Eared Grebe as well as a Horned Grebe, both in breeding plumage. Horned Grebes are very common in winter and early spring on the river but Eared Grebe is a rarity, though not on par with either of the ducks, but quite a good find. And to be in breeding plumage is almost unheard of in Maryland as they are usually only here in the winter when they're quite drab and are usually gone before molting into their breeding finery.

At least nine people came to see the Barrow's Goldeneye on Saturday and probably more than a dozen on Sunday. Then the whole Maryland Archaeological Conservation lab went down on Monday, using a surveyor's transit to scope out the bird. News of the Barrow's Goldeneye continues to spread helping to put JPPM, rightfully, on the list of excellent birding spots in Maryland.

MARYLAND WOOD DUCK INITIATIVE SEEKS VOLUNTEERS, ADVICE

Since 2004 the Maryland Wood Duck Initiative (MWDI), a volunteer organization (www.mwdi.net), has worked to enhance Maryland's Wood Duck populations, and to increase public appreciation of the birds' wetland habitats. They do this by placing artificial nesting boxes in appropriate habitat, by monitoring and maintaining those nest boxes, and by educational activities that include involving high school students in these activities.

MWDI is asking members of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society to become involved. There are several ways we can help.

1. Join other MWDI volunteers and Maryland Department of Natural Resources personnel to help inspect sites to determine their suitability for a nest box program.
2. Assemble nest boxes from kits provided by MWDI.
3. Place nest boxes, and monitor them for needed repairs or replacement.
4. Recommend new sites for Wood Duck nest boxes, and help MWDI volunteers place and monitor the boxes.
5. Inspect nest boxes at established sites on a regular schedule to record data on nest use and fledging success.

There are already MWDI wood duck nest box programs at these sites where you can volunteer: Myrtle Grove WMA, Chicamuxen WMA, Chapman Landiang, and Indian Head Naval Station in Charles Co.; Calvert Cliffs State park, and King's Landing in Calvert Co.; Jug Bay and Merkel Sanctuary in southern Prince George Co. These sites need volunteers to monitor nest boxes for condition and repair or replacement, and nesting success. There are currently no established sites in St. Mary's County, but MWDI seeks recommendations, and volunteers to set them up and monitor them.

If you wish to recommend wetland sites for the MWDI program, or to volunteer for monitoring teams, or to assemble nesting boxes, contact

Cliff Brown, Executive Director, 3021 45th Street NW,
Washington, DC 20016
telephone 202-363-9857 or 703-447-5142,
e-mail cliftonabrown@aol.com.



Wood Duck drake (*Aix sponsa*), photo by Tim McCabe, US Fish and Wildlife Service.

BIRDS MOVEMENTS REVEAL GLOBAL WARMING THREAT IN ACTION

SPECIES WINTERING FARTHER NORTH SHOW NEED FOR POLICY CHANGE

New York, NY, February 10, 2009- The northward and inland movement of North American birds, confirmed by thousands of citizen-observations, provides new and powerful evidence that global warming is having a serious impact on natural systems, according to new analyses by Audubon scientists. The findings signal the need for dramatic policy changes to combat pervasive ecological disruption.

Analyses of citizen-gathered data from the past 40 years of Audubon's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) reveal that 58 percent of the 305 widespread species that winter on the continent shifted significantly north since 1966, some by hundreds of miles. Movement was detected among species of every type, including more than 70 percent of highly adaptable forest and feeder birds. Only 38 percent of grassland species mirrored the trend, reflecting the constraints of their severely-depleted habitat and suggesting that they now face a double threat from the combined stresses of habitat loss and climate adaptation.

Population shifts among individual species are common, fluctuate, and can have many causes. However, Audubon scientists say the ongoing trend of movement by some 177 species-closely correlated to long-term winter temperature increases-reveals an undeniable link to the changing climate.

"Birds are showing us how the heavy hand of humanity is tipping the balance of nature and causing ecological disruption in ways we are just beginning to predict and comprehend," said report co-author and Audubon Director of Bird Conservation, Greg Butcher, Ph.D. "Common sense dictates that we act now to curb the causes and impacts of global warming to the extent we can, and shape our policies to better cope with the disruptions we cannot avoid."

Movements across all species-including those not reflecting the 40 year trend-averaged approximately 35 miles during the period. However, it is the complete picture of widespread movement and the failure of some species to move at all that illustrate the potential for problems.

Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, and Boreal Chickadee have retreated dramatically north into the Canadian Boreal, their ranges moving an estimated 433, 288, and 279 miles respectively over 40 years. Continuing warming and development are predicted to have adverse impacts on the boreal forest and the species that depend on it.

Red-breasted Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, and American Black Duck, normally found in southern-tier states, have all taken advantage of warmer winter waters and have shifted their ranges north by an estimated 317, 219, and 182 miles. Still, they are likely to be negatively impacted by the

increased drought expected in many parts of North America as global warming worsens.

Only 10 of 26 grassland species moved north significantly, while nine moved south. Species such as Eastern Meadowlark, Vesper Sparrow, and Burrowing Owl were likely unable to move despite more moderate northern temperatures because essential grassland habitat areas have disappeared, having been converted to intensive human uses such as row crops, pastures, and hayfields. In combination, global warming and ongoing overuse of grasslands by humans will doom grassland birds to continued population declines.

"Experts predict that global warming will mean dire consequences, even extinction, for many bird species, and this analysis suggests that that the process leading down that path is already well underway," warned Audubon President John Flicker. "We're witnessing an uncontrolled experiment on the birds and the world we share with them."

Butcher explains that many birds move great distances to find suitable food and habitat, but questions how far they will be able to move in the face of climate change before they run out of habitat, food or even luck. "The long term picture is not good for many species, and even in the short term, a single harsh winter could have a devastating impact on birds that have moved too far," he adds.

New forward-looking research from Audubon California reinforces the national findings, predicting that about 80 of that state's native bird species will experience significant climate-driven reductions in their geographic range over coming decades.

Scientific models indicate that the magnitude of losses in California depends largely on steps taken now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The California Gnatcatcher could lose as much as 56 percent of its range, or as little as 7 percent, depending on how climate change is addressed. Projected range losses for the Bay area's popular Chestnut-backed Chickadee vary from 49 percent to as little as 16 percent.

"The birds are giving us yet another warning that it's time for urgent action," added Flicker. "People hear about melting glaciers and changing weather, but now they can witness the impact global warming is having with the birds they see or don't see right outside their doors. These birds are our 'canaries in the coal mine' and they're telling us that we'd better do something fast to curb global warming and to protect habitat."

Critical steps citizens can take can be found online at Audubon.org and include signing a national petition demanding aggressive federal policy action. Habitat conservation efforts based on forward looking projections such as those from Audubon California are also essential.

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Habitats already under siege from development, energy production and agricultural expansion and other human uses will require enhanced protection and restoration to sustain bird populations and provide ecological benefits essential to human health, economic prosperity and quality of life.

Audubon anticipates that the new avian evidence will help attract the attention and spark action among more than 40 million self-proclaimed U.S. bird-watchers, ten of thousands of whom contributed to the Christmas Bird Count data on which the studies are based. The 109-year-old census provides the world's longest uninterrupted record of bird population trends.

"Citizen Science is allowing us to better recognize the impacts that global warming is having here and now. Only citizen action can help us reduce them," said Butcher.

SMAS NEEDS VOLUNTEERS FOR COMMITTEES AND NOMINATIONS FOR OFFICERS

SMAS Members:

It is the time for some of you to step up and do your part to help our Society. We need a few people to make sure SMAS continues to give its members the programs they enjoy; provides the help our local raptors need; and keeps records of board meetings and accomplishments. Some long-time volunteers having served years helping SMAS, are stepping down or changing positions on our Board.

SMAS needs:

- Secretary for the Board of Directors meetings
- A Director for the Board
- Program Chairperson to coordinate the monthly programs
- Adopt-A-Raptor Chairperson to implement the adoption program.

Please consider helping with these tasks, before you take the simplest way and just say "I do not have time, someone else can do it." There are several Board and Committee members that do work full-time and do serve on our board and in other organizations.

If you are interested in serving, or wish to make a nomination, please contact:

Bob Lukinic, 301-283-6317 Email
rlukinic@peoplepc.com OR

George Jett, Nomination Chairperson, 301-843-3524
Email gmjett@comcast.com

Bob Lukinic, President

FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED



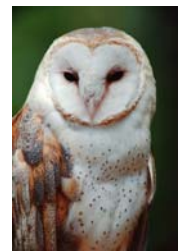
Southern Maryland Audubon Society sponsors the banding of nestling birds of prey, or raptors, with serially numbered aluminum bands in cooperation with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U. S. Department of the Interior, as part of our bird research and conservation activities in Southern Maryland. Limited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

APRIL EVENTS

April 1—**Wednesday**—7:30 PM. **Monthly Meeting.**

Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Nature Center, Grey's Road off Sixes Road, Prince Frederick, Calvert County. **An Evening of Nature in Art** by Lisa Egeli, Southern Maryland Acclaimed Artist. Nationally awarded Lisa Egeli comes from a long line of southern Maryland painters. She learned her earliest skills from her father, Peter Egeli, and continued developing her gift for representational art in diverse media at the Academy of Art in Chicago. Her goal, whether portraying the wilds of Alaska, the endangered mountain gorillas of Uganda, or the haunting marshes of Maryland's Eastern Shore, is to capture a sense of place. She also captures that combination of awe and intimacy that is the essence of an encounter with nature. Come enjoy this evening of lush, magnificent art.

April 4—**Saturday**—9:00 AM to noon. **Special Volunteer Event.**

Marshall Hall Park, Charles County. **Potomac River Watershed Cleanup.** Coordinator: Bob Lukinic, 301-283-6317, e-mail rlukinic@peoplepc.com. Volunteers needed. Contact coordinator Bob Lukinic for details.

April 11—**Saturday**—8:30 AM to noon. **Field Trip.**

Flag Ponds Nature Park, Calvert County. **Spring Wildflowers and Early Migrants.** Leader: Susan Noble (410-535-5870, sjanenoble@comcast.net). Greet spring by visiting one of the best wildflower displays in Southern Maryland. The varied habitat here also yields a nice variety of birds. From Rte. 2/4 about 10 miles south of Prince Frederick follow Flag Pond Parkway to the entrance booth, proceed into the park and meet at Visitor Center. Facilities and no fee. RSVP welcome!

April 18—**Saturday**—8:00 AM to noon. **Field Trip.**

Thomas Stone Historical Site, Charles County. **Early Spring Migrants.** Leader: Ann Wearmouth (301-955-9028, ann.wearmouth@mirant.com). Search for early spring ephemerals as well as early migrants at the Thomas Stone Historical Site on Rose Hill Road in Port Tobacco. True spring ephemerals are plants that complete their full seasonal cycle before the trees leaf out and block the sun. We'll search for these as well as other harbingers of spring in the varied habitat at Habre de Venture. Wear good hiking shoes. At Rte 301 and Rte 6 in La Plata, take Rte. 6 (Port Tobacco Road). Go about 3 miles and turn right onto Rose Hill Road. Follow to the park entrance on the left. Park across from the park at the private residence, Stone's Throw.

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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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