

The Osprey



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www.geocities.com/smdaudubon

Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

SEVENTH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT INVITES EVERYONE TO "COUNT FOR THE BIRDS"

Learn How to Make Your Family and Your Backyard Bird-friendly While Contributing to Conservation

New York, NY & Ithaca, NY, September 17, 2003 – In the United States, an average of 2.1 million acres of land is converted to residential use every year. Eighty percent of U.S. households have private lawns. This enormous habitat must not be overlooked in efforts to conserve North American birds and other natural resources, especially since it can be easily managed by the millions of bird and nature lovers as healthy havens for wildlife—and not-so-wildlife.

From February 13-16, 2004, bird enthusiasts are invited to take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), a project developed and managed by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited store owners and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a division of the USDA. During the event, everyone who enjoys birds will be able to submit their observations through BirdSource <http://www.birdsource.org>. GBBC participants will help conservationists, ornithologists, and the rest of the world determine the status of bird populations continent-wide. At the same time, the project will teach participants how to turn their backyards into habitat for birds.

For beginning bird enthusiasts in Southern Maryland, SMAS is sponsoring a special GBBC field trip to Myrtle Point Park on February 16, at 9 a.m. The leader is Bob Boxwell (301-872-5998) This field trip is geared for persons from middle school and up. See "FEBRUARY EVENTS" for details.

"Backyards are an important way to create greenways for birds between parks and wild areas," said Frank Gill, Audubon's Director of Science. "They allow for the cultivation of native plants and provide essential sanctuary to migratory and resident birds. Participating in projects such as the Great Backyard Bird Count gives people a first-hand view of how important bird-friendly backyards are to many bird species."

The purpose of the Great Backyard Bird Count is to track the abundance and distribution of North America's winter birds, as a means to ensure that common birds remain common, especially during a time when birds face many environmental hurdles. "The Great Backyard Bird Count is

a terrific way for individuals, families, schools, and community groups to contribute to a better understanding of birds," says Gill. "Another way is to create healthy backyard habitat, especially during this time of environmental challenges that includes habitat loss and degradation."

An important step in creating healthy habitats is to become a "bird-friendly family." Going on a family bird-watching outing and keeping a yearly list of the birds that visit the yard are examples of ways families can become bird-friendly. Keeping a pair of binoculars and a field guide handy are particularly good for encouraging children to learn more about birds and the habitat right around their home. "Kids are naturally curious about the environment in which they live, and birds are a terrific window into that environment," says John Fitzpatrick, Director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Because children are the environmental caretakers of the future, it's important that we do all that we can to foster their interest in the natural world."

In preparation for the GBBC, bird enthusiasts are invited to visit the web site for suggestions on how to become a bird-friendly family. Complementing that, they are also invited to explore the "Audubon At Home" site to learn the best ways to improve the health and increase the diversity of their backyards with native plants, water, and other wildlife-friendly elements. By promoting the basic message: reduce pesticide use; conserve water; protect water quality; plant native species; and remove exotic pests, *Audubon At Home* seeks to involve everyone in creating healthier habitat for birds, other wildlife, and people, too.

The researchers hope that by learning more about the birds and habitats in their own backyards, families will decide to become part of Project FeederWatch, a winterlong survey of birds that visit feeders. "FeederWatch data have been instrumental in our scientific analyses of winter finch movements, Varied Thrush cycles, and have even helped us discover a new avian disease, mycoplasmal conjunctivitis, or House Finch eye disease," says Fitzpatrick. "These findings are thanks to dedicated FeederWatchers."

Gill adds, "Hand in hand with participating in projects such as the Great Backyard Bird Count and Project FeederWatch, it's important to remember that when we invite birds and wildlife into our yards we are responsible for keeping these guests safe from man-made hazards." He points out that more than 100 million and perhaps as many as a billion birds are killed each year when they collide with windows. Instructions about the decreasing window kills,

proper placement of birdhouses and feeders, keeping house cats indoors, and the removal of other threats to the health and safety of wild creatures will be available to participants and anyone who visits the Great Backyard Bird Count website.

In addition to the bird-friendly tips, this year's GBBC will again help participants across the continent identify puzzling backyard species, especially those that are easily confused with other species like the American Tree Sparrow, which to the uninitiated can look much like the more southerly wintering Chipping Sparrow. The site will also explain why some familiar bird names have been changed. For example, the much-loved Rufous-sided Towhee is now considered two separate species by the scientific community, - the Eastern Towhee (in the East) and the Spotted Towhee (in the West).

As always, the GBBC web site also includes a vocabulary section, bird-watching and bird-feeding tips, bird vocalizations, and more, including information about Project FeederWatch and House Finch eye disease. Educators will find the bibliography and geography sections especially handy, and there are even suggestions on how to conduct the count with groups of children.

Instructions for participating can be found at www.birdsource.org/gbbc. There's no fee or registration. Those who would like to participate but aren't online can try their local library. Many Wild Birds Unlimited store owners, as proud supporters of the count, are online to accept reports and in support of the GBBC are donating a portion of purchases made by their customers. Libraries, businesses, nature clubs, Scout troops, and other community organizations interested in promoting the GBBC or getting involved can contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at 800/ 843-2473 (outside the U.S., call 607/254-2473), 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, New York 14850, or the National Audubon Society at citizenscience@audubon.org or (215) 355-9588, Ext 16, Audubon Science Office, 545 Almshouse Road, Ivyland, PA 18974.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a nonprofit membership institution interpreting and conserving the earth's biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds.

Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our Citizen Science programs for bird enthusiasts, and advocacy on behalf of Important Bird Areas, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in positive conservation experiences.

LOGGING UNDERMINES DIVERSITY ESSENTIAL TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

*By Bob DeGroot, Maryland Alliance for Greenway
Improvement and Conservation*

(Editors Note: This article is based on a letter that appeared in the Cumberland Times-News on December 2, 2003. Bob's article is an eloquent argument for preserving forests in their naturally diverse condition for the benefit of both human societies and wildlife.)

The letter by Paul Shogren from Oakland expressed the opinion, quoting Gifford Pinchot, that "the human race should control the use of the earth and all that is therein." This is a shortsighted view of the world we live in. It assumes that we fully understand how everything works in the world, and can manage it better than nature can itself.

Scientists will tell you that "ecosystems are not only more complex than we think, they are more complex than we can think." They know that we understand only a small part of how natural processes work and that we probably will never have all the answers. Lacking all the answers means we should at least display a little more humility about our ability to manage important resources like forests.

Today we know that U.S. forests are home to more than 3,000 species of fish and wildlife and many thousands of insects. It's estimated that 75 percent of the mammals and 45 percent of the birds around the world endangered by industrial civilization are threatened because of the loss of forest habitat. For amphibians and reptiles, the percentages are even higher.

Shouldn't we at least be as concerned about loss of bio-diversity as we are about the loss of forest products that can often be replaced with non-wood products? Making shipping pallets out of trees, using the pallet once, and then discarding it in a landfill is certainly not a very wise use of an important resource like a forest. Some people don't understand why bio-diversity is important to them, and therefore discount its importance. Food, air, and clean water are available only because of bio-diversity sustained by the earth. All of the crops we grow, foods we eat, and animals we keep are derived directly or indirectly from wild species. Many of the grains and fruits we eat depend upon wild insects to pollinate them. The loss of even a few of these pollinators will raise havoc with our food supplies.

In spite of what the forest industry says, heavily managed forests do not provide the diversity of life that is normal in unlogged forests. The forests of the earth are important to assuring survival of these species. We should be equally thankful for the plants and trees that absorb the carbon dioxide we breathe out, and convert it into oxygen necessary for human life.

Forests are an important part of this life cycle, but heavily managed forests are not of particular benefit. While forest industry people tell us that logging is necessary for healthy forests, anyone even faintly familiar with an unlogged forest should immediately know this is false. The original unlogged forests that remain in the U.S. are hotspots of bio-diversity. The forest industry is now using forest fires in the West as a reason to log Eastern forests. Dr. Edward O. Wilson, a university research professor emeritus at Harvard, wrote recently “the best way to avoid catastrophic fires is by trimming undergrowth and clearing debris, combined with natural burns of the kind that have sustained healthy forests in past millennia.” These procedures, guided by science and surgically precise forestry, can return forests to near their equilibrium condition, in which only minimal further intervention would be needed. The worst way to create healthy forests, on the other hand, is to thin trees via increased logging, as proposed by the Bush administration.

The forest industry often overlooks the negative aspects of logging. These include the roads that are cut into forests to remove logs. These roads provide pathways for exotic invasive species which are overrunning many forests and crowding out native bio-diversity. Logging roads further fragment wildlife habitat to the detriment of many species, and often cause sedimentation in streams that suffocate fish. While a logged forests can provide habitat for many species, the dominant species in a logged forest are usually those already in abundance in Maryland like the whitetail deer. The rare and endangered species that are less common in forests are often lost when logging activities open the forest canopy to sunlight and drying conditions.

In order to preserve biodiversity and ultimately our way of life, we need to protect many mature forests, and provide biological connections between fragmented forests. All remaining old growth forests should receive immediate protection, and logging should be restricted to forests specifically designated for that purpose. The wasteful use of wood products should be stopped.

A ‘SNAPSHOT’ OF LAST YEAR’S GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT FINDINGS

Last winter, as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count, bird enthusiasts across North America submitted almost **50,000 checklists totaling more than four million birds of 512 species** during the February count. The event, one of the largest citizen-science projects in the world, documented a regional decline of the **American Crow** that may be the result of West Nile virus in those regions. These crows were reported in alarmingly fewer numbers in Illinois and Ohio, where West Nile virus has had a strong presence, backing findings from the Christmas Bird Count and a winter-long citizen-science project, Project FeederWatch. “This

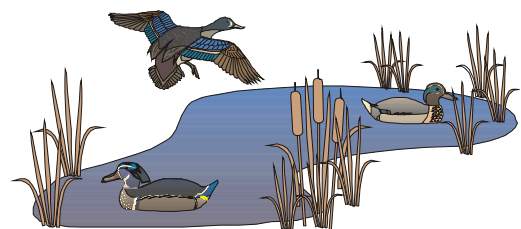
decrease may or may not be related to West Nile, but the situation is certainly something we need to pay attention to,” says Fitzpatrick. Crows are particularly vulnerable to the virus.

Other species showed increases last year during the GBBC. Participants in the eastern United States counted more **Dark-eyed Juncos** than they had since GBBC 2000, perhaps because of the massive snowstorm that hit the eastern seaboard during the weekend of the count, driving birds to feeders in high numbers. That same snowstorm apparently held early migrants such as **Red-winged Blackbird**, **Eastern Meadowlark**, and **American Woodcock** farther south, compared to previous years.

Continued on page 4

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Melanie Anderson, Waldorf
Linda Appicello, Solomons
Richard Baldwin, Dunkirk
Anne Clingenpeel, Waldorf
Todd Coe, Piney Point
April Delancy, Mechanicsville
Franklin Eckels, Ft. Washington
John S. Gray Jr, Owings
Carol L. Halstead, Leonardtown
Marilyn E. Hardin, Oxon Hill
Mike Hassay, St. Leonard
James Howard, Dunkirk
Jean B. Hugg, Solomons
V. Hungerford, Indian Head
Tom McClay, Hollywood
Richard A. Molen, Leonardtown
Paula Muth, Prince Frederick
Lawrence I. Nuse, Lusby
Ruth K. Ornstein, Ft Washington
January Righter, Cobb Island
Michael Ring, Mechanicsville
Mary E. Robinson, Lusby
Sherry L. Ryan, Dunkirk
Stephanie I. Thomas, Ft. Washington
Shirley Wise, Hughesville



In the West, **Mountain Bluebirds** were reported farther south than the year before, and all of the **rosy finches (Black, Gray-crowned, Brown-capped)** were documented farther north. In previous years, GBBC maps of **Eurasian Collared-Doves**, introduced in the Bahamas before reaching Florida in the 1980s showed the species spreading quickly northwestward. Last year's maps show no change, suggesting a slow down in the rate at which the bird's range is spreading.

How will this winter compare to the last six? What will it reflect about our bird populations? The participation of novice and expert bird watchers alike will help us answer these questions. "We need every birder to participate with us," said Gill. "The Great Backyard Bird Count has become an important means of gathering data to help birds, but it can't happen unless people take part. Whether you're a novice or an expert, **we need you to help us help birds.**"

WANTED: CAMP SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS

Teachers, naturalists and environmental educators – now is the time to submit your application for a scholarship from Southern Maryland Audubon Society to attend the National Audubon Society's Workshop for Educators.

At the March SMAS board of directors meeting, an applicant will be selected to receive full tuition to attend the summer camp.

The Workshop for Educators will be held from July 11 – 17 on Hog Island, Maine. Transportation is the responsibility of the scholarship applicant. More information may be found on the Maine Audubon website: maineaudubon.org.

An applicant must send a letter requesting the scholarship and describing how the camp experience will enhance his or her knowledge, teaching and outreach. A letter of recommendation from a supervisor or principal also must be sent.

Send applications and letters of recommendation by Monday, March 22, 2004 to:

Millie Kriemelmeyer
SMAS Education Chair
16900 Mattawoman Lane
Waldorf MD 20601
Phone: 301-372-8766
Fax: 301-782-7615
Email: milliek@radix.net

FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED

The gift of an osprey adoption becomes part of a special fund for the support of osprey research and raptor conservation projects in Southern Maryland. The foster parent receives:

- 1) A certificate of adoption of an osprey fledgling banded with a numbered U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg band. The certificate gives the location and date the osprey was banded.
- 2) Information on osprey ecology and migration patterns, a 5"x7" photo of a fledgling and information that Steve receives on the whereabouts or fate of the bird.

Interested? Here's how to become an Osprey parent. Send \$10.00, with the form, for each fledgling to be adopted to:

**Southern Maryland Audubon Society
P.O. Box 181
Bryan's Road, Maryland 20616**

ADOPT AN OSPREY

Name: _____

Address: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____



You can choose to either adopt an Osprey from

Patuxent River

Potomac River

HELP SMAS PROVIDE BINOCULARS
FOR SCHOOL AND YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS



DONATION FOR BINOCULAR FUND

Your name: _____ Amount donated \$ _____

Your address: _____

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

2004 SOUTHERN MARYLAND ISSUE FORUM

Citizens Campaign for the Environment sponsors Issue Forums that offer citizens throughout Maryland opportunities to learn about priority environmental legislation, and ways to take action to protect our communities, natural resources, and the Chesapeake Bay. Issue Forums are held throughout Maryland where environmental leaders present top issues facing this year's Maryland General Assembly. We encourage citizens who are concerned about Maryland's environment and the Chesapeake Bay to attend and learn how to become involved.

The Issue Forum for Southern Maryland (Calvert Charles, and St. Mary's Counties) will be held Tuesday, February 3, from 7:00-9:00 p.m. at the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, 15035 Burnt Store Road (MD Rt. 231), Hughesville. For information contact Millie Kriemelmeyer, milliek@radix.net; tel. 301-372-8766, or Bob Boxwell, bobboxwell@hotmail.com; tel. 410-414-3311 (W) or 301-872-5998 (H).

NEW OR RENEWAL 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 and the local chapter, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society, at the Introductory Offer. I will receive the *Audubon* magazine, the chapter newsletter, *The Osprey*, and support National and local environmental causes.
- Please **renew** my membership in the National Audubon Society and the local chapter, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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

Chapter-Only Dues, payable to Southern Maryland Audubon Society

- (new/renewal)
- Individual/Family \$20
 - Senior/Student \$15
 - Optional Donation \$ _____

National Dues, payable to National Audubon Society

- Introductory Offer - 1 year \$20
- Introductory Offer - 2 year \$30
- Senior/Student \$15
- Renewal Rate \$35

FEBRUARY EVENTS

February 4—Wednesday—7:30 p.m. **Monthly Meeting**
Clearwater Nature Center, Cosca Regional Park, Prince George's County, Clinton

Colonial Waterbirds of Southern Maryland, by Dave Brinker, Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Dave Brinker, Central Region Ecologist with the Natural Heritage Program, will share his considerable experience with waterbirds that nest in colonies (including terns, herons, egrets, pelicans, and cormorants). He will focus on recent work on the breeding colonies of these birds in southern Maryland, and statewide.

February 16—Monday—9:00 a.m. **Field Trip**

Myrtle Point Park, St. Mary's County.

Great Backyard Bird Count. Leader: Bob Boxwell (301-872-5998). Half day trip. Join in this fun and educational event. See the article on page 1 for more information about the GBBC. Diverse habitat should make for an interesting morning. Geared for middle school and older. From Calvert County, take Rt. 4 across the Thomas Johnson Bridge and turn right on Patuxent Blvd. about 2.25 mile west of the bridge. From St. Mary's County take Rt. 4 towards Solomons and turn left on Patuxent Blvd. Follow Patuxent Blvd. to the end and meet in the parking lot on the left.

February 21—Saturday—8:30 a.m. **Field Trip**

Fort Washington Park, Prince George's County
Waterfowl and winter land birds. Leader: Gwen Brewer (301-843-3524). Half day trip. The park's shorelines, forests, and fields provide good opportunities to see waterfowl and

land birds. From the south, turn left off Rt. 210 onto Old Fort Road. At the end turn left on Fort Washington Road and go to the entrance gate. From the north, turn right off Rt. 210 onto Fort Washington Road and go about 3 miles to the park entrance. Follow the park road and turn right onto the road to the lighthouse. Meet in the parking lot at the bottom of the hill.

March 3—Wednesday—7:30 p.m. **Monthly Meeting**

Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Nature Center, Calvert County, Prince Frederick.

Gardening for Birds, by Robin Affron and Joyce Baker, Homestead Gardens. Get in the mood for spring gardening and learn how to make your garden a better place for birds! Robin and Joyce will present information on plantings and other ways to create a sanctuary for birds in your own backyard.

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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.

Southern Maryland Audubon Society
P.O. Box 181 Bryan's Road, MD 20616

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