

LONGTIME SMAS LEADER HONORED BY MARYLAND DNR

On February 24, the Department of Natural Resources Maryland Tributary Strategies Team honored SMAS's George Wilmot with its 2005 Bernie Fowler Award. The prestigious award was given in recognition of his long commitment to protecting the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. He has been a key member of the Lower Potomac River Tributary Team since the program's inception ten years ago. The award, presented by DNR Secretary Franks, is a plaque mounted with a pair of white tennis shoes. The shoes represent the former Senator Fowler's annual wading into the Patuxent River to see how deep he can go before losing sight of his feet. George's nomination was supported by letters from many Southern Maryland environmental organizations and individuals, including SMAS.

Dr. Wilmot has served for many years on local and state conservation and water quality committees, and has served as Chairperson of the SMAS Conservation Committee throughout our 35-year history. Working in his knowledgeable, quietly modest yet energetic manner, he has remained steadfastly dedicated to protecting the environment. He inspires all who are fortunate to know and work with him in committees and in the field. We congratulate him for this much deserved award.

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS IN MARYLAND AND DC - NOMINATE A SITE!

By David Curson and Matt Hafner

Over the past few months David Curson has been traveling around Maryland and DC talking with Audubon Society chapters and bird clubs about Audubon's Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program. Important Bird Areas are sites that provide essential habitat to one or more species in any of three categories of birds in need of conservation: species at risk owing to rapidly decreasing or small population size, or subject to a specific threat; species dependent on a single habitat type (habitat specialists); and species that gather in large numbers. The goal of the program is to protect and actively manage IBAs for these vulnerable birds, so that a network of IBAs ensures the persistence of healthy populations of these species across the state, and across all of North America.

It is enormously helpful in identifying IBAs if people familiar with important sites and their birds nominate them for consideration. This provides the ornithological data necessary to evaluate whether a site is of IBA quality. This

also helps provide information on land use and ownership, habitats, and potential threats needed to plan appropriate conservation measures. The first 14 IBAs in Maryland and DC were publicly recognized in 2005. These include:

- Assateague Island, Worcester County.
- Belt Woods, Prince George's County.
- Blackwater-Fishing Bay Marshes, Dorchester County.
- Central Chesapeake Islands, Somerset & Dorchester Counties.
- Chapman Forest, Charles County.
- Cranesville Swamp, Garrett County.
- Deal Island, Somerset County.
- Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Kent County.
- Finzel Swamp, Garrett County.
- Fort Smallwood, City of Baltimore.
- Hart-Miller Island, Baltimore County.
- Jug Bay, Anne Arundel & Prince George's Counties.
- Maryland Coastal Bays, Worcester County.
- Wolf Swamp, Garrett County.

We ask everyone to consider nominating an IBA. This year is the time to do so because our goal is to have all IBAs in Maryland and DC identified by 2007. We recommend a teamwork approach because nominators will likely have to compile bird data from a variety of sources to document a site sufficiently for review. Data may include such sources as Christmas Bird Counts, Midwinter Waterfowl Surveys, other surveys coordinated by the Department of Natural Resources, site-specific surveys, bird counts taken during club field trips, Breeding Bird Atlas fieldwork, or personal birding observations. SMAS has established an IBA nominating committee to compile information for Southern Maryland.

Site nominations are reviewed by the IBA Technical Review Committee, whose members are: Kyle Rambo (Chair), Patuxent River Naval Air Station; Wayne Bell, Washington College; David Curson, Audubon Maryland-DC; Lynn Davidson, Md. Department of Natural Resources; Matt Hafner, Maryland Ornithological Society; Peter Marra, National Zoo, Smithsonian Institution; Greg Kearns, Patuxent River Park; Glenn Therres, Md. Department of Natural Resources. The Committee recently revised the IBA criteria to include numerical site-level thresholds for each species at risk (see table 1). This will help nominators to judge whether their site is likely to qualify as an IBA.

Continued on Page 2

Table 1. Numerical site-level thresholds for species at risk in Maryland and DC

Species	At-risk Category (in MD-DC)	Threshold Breeding Pairs	Threshold Nonbreeding individuals ¹
American Bittern	Severely at risk	2	6
Northern Goshawk	Severely at risk	2	B
Black Rail	Severely at risk	2	6
Wilson's Plover	Severely at risk	2	6
Piping Plover	Severely at risk	2	6
Upland Sandpiper	Severely at risk	2	30
Red Knot	Severely at risk	N/A	40
Gull-billed Tern	Severely at risk	5	30
Royal Tern	Severely at risk	10	B
Black Skimmer	Severely at risk	5	30
Northern Saw-whet Owl	Severely at risk	2	B
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Severely at risk	3	9
Loggerhead Shrike	Severely at risk	3	9
Bewick's Wren (subsp. <i>altus</i>)	Severely at risk	3	9
Sedge Wren	Severely at risk	3	9
Swainson's Warbler	Severely at risk	3	9
Mourning Warbler	Severely at risk	3	B
Henslow's Sparrow	Severely at risk	5	9
Pied-billed Grebe	Highly at risk	5	B
Northern Harrier	Highly at risk	5	15
Peregrine Falcon	Highly at risk	3	30
Whimbrel	Highly at risk	N/A	60
Common Tern	Highly at risk	30	60
Least Tern	Highly at risk	20	60
Short-eared Owl	Highly at risk	3	15
Alder Flycatcher	Highly at risk	5	B
Golden-winged Warbler	Highly at risk	5	15
Nashville Warbler	Highly at risk	5	B
Blackburnian Warbler	Highly at risk	10	B
Cerulean Warbler	Highly at risk	10	15
Canada Warbler	Highly at risk	10	30
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow	Highly at risk	N/A	15
Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow	Highly at risk	10	15
Swamp Sparrow (Coastal Plain subsp. <i>nigrescens</i>)	Highly at risk	10	30
Dickcissel	Highly at risk	5	30
Rusty Blackbird	Highly at risk	N/A	60
Brown Pelican	At risk	40	B
Least Bittern	At risk	5	15
Little Blue Heron	At risk	40	30
Brant	At risk	N/A	120
American Black Duck	At risk	20	240
Bald Eagle	At risk	10	60
Northern Bobwhite	At risk	20	120
King Rail	At risk	5	B
Sora	At risk	5	B
Common Moorhen	At risk	5	15
American Golden Plover	At risk	N/A	60
American Oystercatcher	At risk	5	15
Purple Sandpiper	At risk	N/A	240
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	At risk	N/A	30
Short-billed Dowitcher	At risk	N/A	240
American Woodcock	At risk	10	45
Black-billed Cuckoo	At risk	10	30
Common Nighthawk	At risk	5	B
Chuck-will's-widow	At risk	10	30
Whip-poor-will	At risk	10	30
Red-headed Woodpecker	At risk	10	30
Willow Flycatcher	At risk	20	60
Bank Swallow	At risk	40	B
Brown-headed Nuthatch	At risk	30	120
Wood Thrush	At risk	160	480
Blue-winged Warbler	At risk	15	30
Prairie Warbler	At risk	30	60
Prothonotary Warbler	At risk	30	60
Worm-eating Warbler	At risk	20	60
Northern Waterthrush	At risk	10	B
Louisiana Waterthrush	At risk	20	60
Kentucky Warbler	At risk	30	60
Seaside Sparrow	At risk	40	120

¹B = At risk status applies to breeding populations only.

As you examine the list of species at risk and their site-level thresholds in Table 1 note that is not based simply on rarity within Maryland and DC. All the birds listed as endangered, threatened or in need of conservation by the Maryland DNR are present, but so are some species that are widespread in the state, such as American Black Duck and Prairie Warbler. The latter are among those of conservation concern at the continental, or even global, scale, appearing on conservation listings such as Audubon's WatchList and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Birds of Conservation Concern. For such species the center of their geographical range, where their populations tend to be densest, is an important place to plan for their conservation. The site-level thresholds are lower for birds at greater risk because the aim is to capture a larger proportion of these species' populations in the network of IBAs.

Table 1. IBA site-level thresholds of bird species at risk in Maryland and DC. For further details see IBA criteria for site selection at : http://www.audubonmddc.org/SciCon_IBAs.html

Other criteria for IBAs include:

- Site supports a bird species assemblage characteristic of rare or representative habitats, e.g. Forest Interior Dwelling Species, grassland birds etc.
- Site has significant concentration of birds.
- Site where long-term research or monitoring continues to generate, and publish, high quality data of value to conservation planning at the statewide scale.

Please consult the Audubon Maryland-DC website for full details of the IBA criteria as well as exceptions. A site can meet as few as one of the criteria listed to be selected as an IBA. Copies of the criteria and nomination forms are available at Audubon's newly updated website at http://www.audubonmddc.org/SciCon_IBAs.html or by contacting Audubon MD-DC's Director of Bird Conservation, David Curson, at: Audubon MD-DC, 2437 Eastern Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21224, Tel: (410) 558 2473, e-mail dcurson@audubon.org.

WINTER BIRDING NEAR THE SOUTHWESTERN BORDER

By Dean Newman

[*Editor's note: This is second part of a two part account in which Dean describes a whirlwind birding trip to New Mexico and Arizona this past January with old friend Roger and new friend Kevin.*]

Amongst the many birders we'd met so far on our trip—a disproportionate number from Maryland whose names I recognized from MDOsprey—we'd heard about a Rufous-backed Robin at Boyce Thompson Arboretum in Superior, AZ. Both Roger and Kevin had the bird for their AZ state lists and I, not knowing the arboretum was on the way,

never gave the bird a second thought. I needed it for a lifer. Driving east on US 60 back to Albuquerque, I was in the passenger seat contemplating the most wonderful tamales I'd purchased at the last gas station—Roger wouldn't let us stop for lunch—when we spotted the entrance literally seconds ahead. Kevin said something about it being too bad no one needed the bird and I, through a mouthful of mystery meat in chili sauce muttered a muffled, "I do". Roger slid the car into the parking lot on two wheels. Are these great friends or what?

It was around 1:00 p.m. when we arrived at the arboretum and inquiries of the staff there informed us the robin was usually seen between 3:30 p.m. and 4:00. Never once did the other two complain. On the contrary, Kevin and Roger made it their life mission to show me that bird. We birded the grounds picking up several species, including Crissal and Curve-billed Thrasher while we waited for the robin to appear. Right on cue, at 3:30, Roger muttered "Here's the robin", and twenty awaiting birders raced toward him. There, sitting right out in the open, fifty feet away, was the bird.

Seems I wasn't the only one who needed it for a lifer. Folks were yahooping, high-fiving and dancing jigs when Roger made me stop and settle down. It was a long walk back to the car.

If you've never driven Route 60 between Phoenix and Albuquerque, you've missed one of the most interesting drives in America. Leaving Superior, headed east, you immediately enter mining country. Huge strip mines, while not beautiful but very interesting, have altered the shape of the terrain; making plateaus out of mountain tops and excavating deep pits that seem to drop forever. Soon after that you enter Salt Canyon. Although a "little brother" to the Grand Canyon, the fact that you're driving along its precipitous edge makes it every bit as awesome. After that its high desert with its chilly temperatures (+02° F while we were there), altitude-specific conifers and one-horse towns securely anchored by ubiquitous convenience stores. Pronghorn, mule deer and elk supplement Pinyon Jays, Mountain and Western Bluebirds, and at least three subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco as natural interest items.

Stopping for gas in Datil, NM—there's only one place—I caught Roger with his face pressed tight against a pastry case filled with home-made pies. He was looking at a chocolate pecan number with a gaze most men reserve for Harley Davidson motorcycles, heavy machinery, or 20 year-old women; in that order. That's the only time I've ever seen him display unbridled lust and it was all focused on a pie. I had to agree. Whoever owns that gas station/café, can sure make good-looking pies.

About that time, Kevin had finished gassing up the car and yelled that we were "burning daylight". It's amazing how a little open range, drifting tumbleweeds and high-plains drifting can make even a fellow from Chattanooga talk like John Wayne. We were out in a flash and on our way to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.

Continued on page 4

Located about 100 miles south of Albuquerque, Bosque del Apache is famous for its wintering Sandhill Cranes. Thousands of them along with hundreds of thousands Snow and Ross' Geese greeted our arrival that afternoon. Golden Eagles were in fair numbers, and I for the first time was able to observe one perched. Over the years I've seen hundreds of Golden across the West but I don't believe I've ever seen them any way other than flying. I felt silly asking my two superior-birder friends to help me identify a perched juvenile eagle but I was amazed how much smaller the bill and feet are as compared to a Bald Eagle. Even the body is smaller. Until then I was under the general impression the Golden was a larger bird. Of course, the field guides confirmed all they were saying. It just goes to show, epiphanies await you even in the familiar.

By far our best bird at the "Bosque" as we who are familiar with the refuge refer to it (think Barney Fife as I say that) was an overhead fly-by of a Prairie Falcon. Clearly showing its dark axillaries (arm pits), Kevin spotted the bird as I was raiding Roger's stash of fruit pies.

Yellow-headed Blackbirds composed about ten percent of the Icterids we saw and it was great practice for identifying them in Eastern flocks. As we left the refuge after sundown, Roger spotted a Great Horned Owl on a small limb over hanging the road. We photographed it and left it in peace. What a great ending to a great trip.

Our tally was 120 species for the trip. If you're interested, send me an email and I'll be glad to send you a trip list and even Roger's KILLER picture of the Streak-backed Oriole.

Unlike previous articles, the only "if-you-go" revelation I can offer to make your trip successful is to dress warmly. At temperatures under 10° F, even a small breeze will make your birding miserable. Don't trust weather reports for Albuquerque. Sandia Crest and most of US 60 is several thousand feet higher in elevation than the city and that makes a BIG difference.

If you use the web sites I've given and follow their advice you're sure to have a great trip. As always, if you have specific questions feel free to email me at dean.newman@verizon.net.

BIRDATHON FUNDRAISER WANTS YOUR HELP

By George Jett

Sponsor a team or join one in this all-day event to tally as many species as possible within 24 hours. This is a friendly event to see which county team can brag of finding the most species of birds within that county in a 24-hour period. The date may change depending on the weather, and availability of teams, but the event will be held on the same day for all teams (see note in May Events).

This is an enjoyable way to raise money for SMAS. The first \$600 raised by the Charles County team goes to supporting the Second annual Youth Birding Camp. Other support can be directed to your favorite SMAS project such as the Education Fund. Sponsors can choose where the funds go, but all proceeds go to SMAS, and are fully tax deductible.

Donations: Sign up sheets will be available at the May 3 Monthly Meeting and June 4 Annual Meeting. You don't have to support any specific team but can also support the Birdathon by sending your tax deductible donations payable to "SMAS" to Will Daniel, Treasurer; SMAS, P.O. Box 181; Bryans Road, Maryland 20616. Thanks in advance for your support. It's never too late to donate!

If you wish to participate with a team or lead one, contact your county coordinator:

- Calvert - Arlene Ripley; 301-855-2848; arleneripley@comcast.net
- Charles - George Jett; 301-843-3524, gmjett@comcast.net
- St. Mary's - Kyle Rambo; 301-757-0005; kyle.rambo@navy.mil

The Rules: All teams operate under the same rules. We use the American Birding Association rules which

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Kenneth Bergling, Clements
Barbara Bladen, Mechanicsville
Ileen Bosta, California
Kathleen Cain, Sunderland
M. Cole, Dunkirk
James Covert, Huntingtown
Joy De Arce, Pr Frederick
Mary Evans, California
Prudence Goforth, Pt Republic
Mike Hassay, St Leonard
Nadene Henzsley, Clinton

Ray Hiebert, Coltons Point
Susan Holmes, Great Mills
Harry/Phyllis Hughes, Lusby
Lori Keim, Accokeek
Carol Kiburz, California
Thomas Kidwell, Mechanicsville
Gerard Kusluch, Lexington Park
Claudia Kutzleb, Ft Washington
Temple Madjeski, St Inigoes
Wanda Markakis, Mechanicsville
George McKinley, Huntingtown

Peter Murphy, Bryans Road
Teresa Nunnenkamp, La Plata
Laura Robins, Owings
Majorie Rubala, Mechanicsville
Joan Sampson, Lusby
Helen Schaff, La Plata
Mary Ann Schiller, Barstow
George Schropp, Ft Washington
Mary Steveling, Lusby
Winfield Taylor, Clinton
Darryl Zoller, Dunkirk

standardize the procedure, and put less stress on the birds being observed. The event is for a single day, and up to 24 hours. Species can be listed by sight or sound. Each member of the team should see/hear and identify at least 95 percent of the species reported. No tape playback is permitted during the entire 24-hour period since some birds may be on breeding territory. Scouting is permitted but not required, and stake out nests can be used. To count the nesting species, stand close enough to the nest to see it, and wait 5 minutes before moving on.

Teams can be more than four birders, but team members must stay within sight of each other, unless in the bathroom. Birding through sun roofs is permitted, but discouraged for the driver. Teams should bird only in their team's county. If a team finds a "mega-rarity" (e.g., Yellow-headed Blackbird), they should call the other teams. The other teams called can decide to leave their county, but new species cannot be counted until they return to the assigned county. Rare birds must be documented either in writing or photos. Team captains decide what species are counted, disputes to be settled at gun point and ten paces. This is an honor system.

The Results: The tally rally and the announcement of the winners will be held at the annual meeting on June 4. Come and join in the festivities at the Hard Bargain Farm. See the website for details.

Events continued from page 6

May 20—Saturday—8 a.m. Field Trip
 Smallwood State Park, Charles County. **Nesting and Late Migrant Land and Shore Birds.** Leader: Jean Artes, 301-743-2288, pojartes@aol.com. Half-day trip. From Rte. 225 at Mason Springs, go south on Rte 224 about 4 mi. to the park entrance on the right. Especially good for forest interior birds, but we will also look for Red-headed Woodpecker, late waterfowl, shorebirds, nesting and late migrating neotropical migrants. Previous years have yielded Least and Olive-sided Flycatchers. Bring a telescope if you have one. Facilities available, there may be an entrance fee.

May 27—Saturday—8 a.m. Field Trip
 St. Mary's River State Park, St. Mary's County. **Nesting birds in Southern Maryland.** Leader: Bob Boxwell, 410-394-1300, robertjohnboxwell@yahoo.com. Hone your atlas skills. The combination of forest and swamp habitat should yield a variety of nesting birds. Some walking required. Take Indian Bridge Rd. from Rte. 4 between Leonardtown and California, and meet at the second hunters' parking lot on the left in about 4 miles. No facilities, no fee.

May 31—Wednesday—7 p.m. Board of Directors Meeting
 Location to be determined. Directors meetings are open to any member. Contact your County Representative or any Director or Officer for details of time and place.

.....
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 at the Introductory Offer. My membership will also include membership in the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. I will receive National's *Audubon* magazine, the chapter newsletter, *The Osprey*, and support National and local environmental causes. A fraction of my dues will be returned to the local chapter.
- Please **renew** my membership in the National Audubon Society and the local chapter, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. A fraction of my dues will be returned to the local chapter.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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

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

- Individual/Family __1yr \$20 __2yr \$38 __3yr \$56
- Senior/Student __1yr \$15 __2yr \$28 __3yr \$42
- Optional Donation \$ _____

National Dues, Make check payable to
National Audubon Society

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

MAY EVENTS

May 3—**Wednesday**—7:30 p.m. **Monthly Meeting**
St. Mary's memorial Library, Leonardtown, St. Mary's County.
Butterflies of Southern Maryland by Arlene Ripley, Southern Maryland Audubon Society. Expand your horizons and discover the beauty and wonder of the butterflies that occur in Southern Maryland and beyond. Arlene will present a multimedia slideshow displaying the common and unusual butterflies you may see in your garden or while birding. Host and nectar plants, as well as life cycles will be discussed. A follow-up field identification trip is planned for July 22 at Jefferson Patterson Park, Calvert County.

May 6—**Saturday**—8 a.m. **Field Trip**
Greenwell State Park and Trent Hall, St. Mary's County.
Peak Spring Migrants. Leader: Bob Boxwell, 410-394-1300, robertjohnboxwell@yahoo.com. For non Birdathoners, young and old. Join us to explore the state park and historic Trent Hall. Greenwell could produce a nice collection of neotropical migrants. Trent Hall has produced Black-necked Stilt in the past. Meet leader at 8 a.m. at Greenwell State Park. To get there take Sotterly Rd. to Steer Horn Neck Rd., and turn right. Look for the first gate on the left and park in the grassy area next to it. Facilities and no fee.

May 7 or 8—**Sunday or Monday**—All day. **Field Trip**
Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties. **Birdathon**. Sponsor a team or join one in this all-day event to tally as many species as possible within 24 hours. This is a great and fun way to raise money for SMAS. See the article on page 4 for information on how to join a team or sponsor a team.

Southern Maryland Audubon Society
P.O. Box 181 Bryans Road, MD 20616

May 13—**Saturday**—All day. **County May Counts**
Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, and St. Mary's Counties. SMAS will once again census the birds of our region during the annual Maryland Ornithological Society May Count. All levels of birders can help: beginners, backyard birders, experienced birders, team leaders. Contact your county coordinator for assignments or to volunteer a backyard bird watch:

- Calvert: Arlene Ripley, 301-855-2848, arleneripley@comcast.net
- Charles: George Jett, 301-843-3524, gmjett@comcast.net
- Prince George's: Fred Fallon, 301-249-1518, wfallon@earthlink.net
- St. Mary's: Bob Boxwell, 410-394-1300, robertjohnboxwell@yahoo.com

For more information about May Counts see
www.mdbirds.org/counts/namc/namc.html

Continued on page 5

EDITOR: Ernest Willoughby
18335 Hartman Drive, Lexington Park, MD 20653
Telephone: (301) 862-9631
E-mail: ejwilloughby@aol.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.

Non-Profit Org
US POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 39
SOLOMONS
MD

In This Issue:

- Birding the Southwest
- Important Bird Areas Program
- George Wilmot Honored