

The Osprey



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Newsletter of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society

SOUTHERN MARYLAND CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS, 2003-04

POINT LOOKOUT CBC, by Bob Boxwell, Coordinator

Another year another Christmas Bird Count. This year Doug Lister joined me for the morning on December 21. We covered Webster Field and found the birds a bit scarce. The weather was not bad, but as is typical for any winter count, sometimes you find the birds sometimes you don't. Regardless I enjoyed the company while I had it.

Highlights for the count included an American Bittern found by Anne Bishop and enjoyed by Patty Craig and Jim Boxwell. Point Lookout yielded a couple of good species as well. For the second year running we had Sedge Wren and a Saw-whet Owl was special as well. Waterfowl numbers were low with more than 1,800 Canada Geese being the highest count. For ducks, only scaup species topped 1,000. The large rafts that arrive off Point Lookout had not yet arrived.

A number of other species did not show in any numbers. But I can't say a lack of cowbirds or House Sparrows is something I am going to get too upset about. It took over a month to finally tabulate the results. With the last sector finally reported, we ended up with 96 species and a bit over 13,000 individuals. Not great, but not bad. Maybe next year we'll do better.

PORT TOBACCO CBC, by George Wilmot, Coordinator

Fifteen birders in eight teams covered the eight sections of the 15 mile-diameter Port Tobacco Count circle on Sunday, Dec. 28, 2003. Because of poor weather on Dec. 14, the count was rescheduled to Dec. 28. The center of the count circle is on Fourth Point on the Port Tobacco River. The count area extends from Myrtle Grove WMA south into Virginia at Mathias Point and west from Dentsville to Friendship Landing on Nanjemoy Creek. The day was mostly sunny with light winds and temperatures from 25 F in the early morning to 57 F by mid-afternoon.

Overall, the count results are about average, with 84 species and 16247 birds tallied. The averages for the previous 19 years are 87 species and 18608 birds. The number of Canada Geese was 5062 compared to the 19-year average of about 1900 and 2315 in 2002. The number of Mute Swans was 12 for this count compared to 39 in 2002. No Mute Swans were found on this count until 1996. We can expect the number of Mute Swans to rise unless the efforts to reduce the population of this invasive species are more successful. The number of Tundra Swans on this count,

77, was higher than found on the 2002 count but below the 420 average for the previous 19 years. Only 19 Ruddy Ducks were noted on this count compared to the average for the previous 19 years of about 1200. Ruddy Ducks are usually found in large flocks and may have been elsewhere on the Potomac. However, no Ruddy Ducks were found on the Dec. 21, 2003 Point Lookout Count. One White-winged Scoter was found on this count, an unusual duck for the Port Tobacco count. This species was last seen on this count in 1984. 16 Red-breasted Mergansers were seen on this count. This species has been seen on about 1/3 of the last 19 counts.

Five Pine Warblers were found on this count in the count area along the east side of the tidal Port Tobacco River. This is also a fairly uncommon species for this count, seen only on 7 of the last 19 Port Tobacco counts. The numbers of Carolina Chickadees (141), Tufted Titmice (108) and Carolina Wrens (70) found were somewhat below their 19-year averages of 188, 170 and 114. The number of Bald Eagles (24) seen on this count was a little below the average for the previous 5 years (36) but well above the average (7) for the 6 years 1984 – 1989. The Bald Eagle population is recovering from its low numbers caused by DDT poisoning back in the 1950's and 1960's. At the low point, there were only three nesting pairs of Bald Eagles in Charles County. Now there are more than 50.

Overall the 2003 Port Tobacco Christmas Count results were at or above average for the past 20 years with numbers for only a few species being significantly below our 19 year averages for this count. Our thanks to all the birders for their good work on the 2003 Port Tobacco Christmas Count.

On a personal note, I always use to look forward to this count. A dear departed friend Stan Fuller was my partner on this one. He is a hard act to follow, but I'm still taking applications.

FT BELVOIR, MARYLAND, 2003 CBC, by Carol Ghebelian, Coordinator

My count day began on Jan. 4th at 4 a.m. with Spring Peepers calling and ended at 4 p.m. with a Red Bat flying around the yard! Despite the 70 degree high of the day, our 24 birders and 3 feeder watchers found 87 species and 13,776 individuals on the Maryland side of the Ft Belvoir, Va. count circle. The low numbers of waterfowl accounted for the individuals being about 5000 lower than usual.

Birds of note were the Peregrine Falcon found for only the second time on the count by George Jett's party; the 22 Chipping Sparrows seen by Paul Baichich; the 30 American

Pipits spotted by Jett's party; and the American Tree Sparrow found by David and Daniel Wilmot. Thirty-four Bald Eagles were sighted—22 adults, 12 immature. We were delighted to find 12 Red-headed Woodpeckers in this winter of their unusually high numbers in the area. Eastern Bluebirds were depressingly low—only 43 reported from a high of 160 two years ago. The Carolina Wren population seemed healthy, although numbers were down for Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and the two crow species. Northern Bobwhites continue to be missing. We found no winter finches, although the Virginia side reported Pine Siskin.

Thanks again to all the birders for making the day so successful.

PATUXENT RIVER CBC,

by Doug Lister, Co-Coordinator with Andy Brown

The Ninth Patuxent River CBC (can it really be nine years?) has come and gone with mixed results. At least 13 stalwart people in 8 groups braved difficult spring (excuse me) winter birding conditions – mid 50s to low 70s with a light drizzle in the morning to sunny and light breeze in the afternoon. We put in roughly 43 hours of counting covering 150 miles by car and 20 on foot. All this effort conducted on the balmy 4th of January 2004 yielded 94 species and just over 6000 individuals.

All people that reported lamented the same theme of not seeing anything “good” or having a “dismal” count or “not finding easy stuff.” I think its all a matter of perspective that will be related shortly. A few notable birds did present themselves: Prairie Warbler from Cove Point (first count record), Short-eared Owl from NAS Pax River (second count record), and Snow Geese flying up the Patuxent River (second count record and count high). Everything else pretty much was out on holiday as the remaining 91 species almost to the bird came in at a nine-year low.

Now for the perspective. I for one had the best count of my nine-year career. Was it because I saw “good” birds or high numbers of the “easy stuff?” No. I too experienced low numbers of both species and individuals. However, I had the extreme privilege of taking my six-year-old son, Gus, out bird watching. Not birding. He explained the difference to me. We were looking for birds and watching those birds once we found them. Our two most memorable experiences involved a Common Snipe and Short-eared Owl.

We were cruising the Pax River airfield and I explained to Gus that we might find owls or snipe. After using my hand to mimic the snipe's flight pattern Gus posted watch searching left and right for any sign of a snipe or owl. After a few minutes an explosive, “I SEE IT!” almost scared me half to death. Sure enough, we had flushed a snipe and Gus watched it fly away. “Great Jobs” were passed back and forth with many a high five, “all right” and slap on the back. For five minutes Gus talked about how HE saw the

bird first, how HE saw the bird fly in a zigzag pattern (using his hand to demonstrate), and how HE was going to tell mommy that he saw a new bird. Did he study the snipe to the minutest detail? No. Did he chase after it to get a better look? No. He was thrilled to see a bird do what I had explained it would do. It was a beautiful experience. But it gets better.

While still congratulating ourselves about the snipe, I saw in the rear view mirror a bird fly behind the truck. I slowly turned the truck around and took what seemed to be a painfully long time to get Gus on a Short-eared Owl standing in a fairly exposed position. We were so close we didn't need binoculars to see the owl's stunning yellow eyes. We experienced a wonderful lesson in camouflage as the owl slinked into a tuft of grass to escape our view. After a few minutes Gus said, “We should leave now so we don't disturb it.” Out of the mouths of babes . . . ! I've never been more proud in my life.

I believe a successful bird count depends on what frame of mind one brings to the count and what one ultimately takes away from it. If one were simply counting to rack up the numbers or find the ever-elusive Holy Grail, than yes, this year's count would qualify as dismal since neither one materialized. If, on the other hand, one enters the count with the enthusiasm and excitement of a six year old, and bounces with delight at the sight of a flock of turkey vultures, or a male cardinal perched in a shrub, or the erratic flight of a Common Snipe, or the beauty of a Short-eared Owl then one can truly walk away from a low number count with a feeling of satisfaction, pride and accomplishment. I for one know two people that will remember the 9th Patuxent River CBC as a wonderfully successful adventure.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Diane Alexander, Dunkirk
Julie Allinson, Lusby
Terry Andrews, Pr Frederick
Randy Bimson, Accokeek
Anne Bolster, White Plains
A. Buchanan, La Plata
John Goldsmith, Bel Alton
Marcia Greenberg, St Mary's City
Mary Illinski, Clinton
Janice Johnson, Leonardtown
Melissa/Chris Kallfelz, Lusby
Ellis Knox, Solomons
Kathleen Logan, Mechanicsville
Marcia McBride, Park Hall
Deanna Metcalfe, Dunkirk
Tonya Miller, Park Hall
Pete Mullican, Hughesville
Ron Runkles, Mechanicsville
Dr. Sheldon Seidel, Dunkirk
The Stewarts, Owings
Nellie Truedson, Hughesville

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR POTOMAC RIVER CLEANUP

It is again time for our Audubon members to come to the aid of our waterways. The annual Potomac River Cleanup will be on Saturday, April 3, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, rain or shine. Southern Maryland Audubon Society is again sponsoring the cleanup at Marshall Hall Park. The site is located at the western end of Maryland Route 227, approximately five miles from Route 210 at Bryans Road.

Every year, when the volunteers were done, there has been a great improvement in the appearance, safety, and usefulness of the shoreline. The waterfront at Marshall Hall has progressively become less littered owing to the cumulative effect of these yearly cleanups. SMAS members and other community volunteers can be proud that this one-day-a-year effort has helped heal the Potomac River.

Volunteers should come dressed for the weather. Gloves, trash bags, drinks, and snacks will be provided. For more information, contact Site Coordinator, Bob Lukinic, at 301-283-6317. Remember April 3, and we hope to see you there.

THE AUDUBON CAMP IN MAINE - Summer 2004 *Programs at Hog Island For Adults, Youth, Teachers, and Families*

Falmouth, Maine, Friday, January 16, 2004 - Since 1936, Hog Island in Midcoast Maine's Muscongus Bay has been a summer sanctuary and learning center for thousands of people from all parts of the country. At one time or another, many of the most noted names in Audubon's history have taught here, including Roger Tory Peterson and Alan Cruikshank. That tradition continues today at the Audubon Camp in Maine, where top instructors engage participants in a schedule of exceptional programs offered throughout the summer. For those who attend, this "Audubon Experience" becomes a treasured lifetime memory.

Programs for varied interests and ages - Audubon Camp offers a summer-long schedule of excellent programs. Adult workshops are designed for people who want to expand their knowledge and appreciation of nature in a focused and collegial environment. Programs in bird biology, coastal ecology, field drawing and journals, education, and sea kayaking are suitable for novice and experienced alike.

Every year, Southern Maryland Audubon Society holds fundraising events to raise money for scholarships (or "Camperships") to this and other Audubon camps for one or more Southern Maryland educators. The Camp Scholarships pay the fees to attend camp. The campers must provide their own transportation to the camp location. See the details about how to apply for a scholarship in the notice below.

(For a schedule and more information about the Hog Island programs, contact The Audubon Camp in Maine, Maine

Audubon Society, 20 Gilsland Farm Road, Falmouth, ME 04015, (888) 325-5261, <http://www.maineaudubon.org/explore/camp/> . For information about other Audubon Camps, go to www.audubon.org/educate/cw/)

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

REFORM GROUP FALLS SHORT IN NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY PROXY CHALLENGE

By Darrell Whipple, Willapa Hills Audubon Society (Oregon)

A proxy challenge mounted by a reform group within the National Audubon Society brought some tension to an otherwise business-as-usual Annual Meeting of Members on December 6th, 2003, in Erlanger, Kentucky. Reform advocates, failing to command a majority of the proxies, vowed nevertheless to continue the struggle for reform.

The group of local Audubon chapter leaders from more than 50 chapters across the country calls itself Take Back Audubon (TBA) and aims to "restore a true partnership between the independent Chapters and the National Audubon Society through a real voice in the NAS organization and in all decisions that affect Chapters." TBA leaders claim that the organization pays little heed to chapter concerns. They say they are offended that NAS holds noncompetitive elections for its Board of Directors and that NAS has discontinued sharing some \$1.8 million in member dues with the 500 local chapters.

The group was represented at the Annual Meeting by Darrel Whipple, Andrew Mason, Marsha Cannon, John Gallagher, and six other members from various chapters. The dissidents appeared with over 3,200 proxies, but in a showdown on TBA's motion to have the meeting governed by Robert's Rules of Order, the newly-appointed Chairman of the Board Carol Browner and CEO John Flicker voted 37,000 proxies against, and the proposal was defeated.

The election of directors to fill 12 positions on the 36-member board followed a similar pattern, with Flicker voting the 37,000 proxies for the Nominating Committee's nine candidates for at-large positions, and with Gallagher voting 3,200 proxies for TBA's slate of nine candidates, but with both camps voting for the same three regionally-nominated representatives. The three new regional directors are lone Werthman, John Whittle and Steven T. Zimmerman. New at-large directors are Lynn Dolnick, Lloyd Semple and Michael Stolper. Re-elected at-large directors are Leslie Dach, Jack Dempsey, Vivian Johnson, David Walsh, John L. Whitmire, and Alan Wilson.

The TBA leaders later argued for a resolution to reinstate the dues *share* to chapters, a resolution to require competitive elections for the board of directors, and resolutions to provide for initiative measures, congresses of chapters, and "access to basic information."

Chairman Browner asked if these were the same five resolutions the Board of Directors agreed to refer to committees at the September Board meeting in Los Angeles.

Taken aback, Darrel Whipple replied that he had attended the LA meeting but did not learn of any such action by the board. The TBA group then agreed with Carol Browner's suggestion to refer the current versions of the resolutions to the appropriate committees, rather than force an up-or-down proxy vote on each one with no hope of success. The motion for referral, with a guarantee of regular status reports, passed unanimously.

**NORFOLK BOTANICAL GARDEN HOSTS
BIRDS & BLOSSOMS FESTIVAL
A Weekend for Birders & Naturalists
May 6 – 9, 2004**

The 2004 Birds & Blossoms Festival at Norfolk Botanical Garden promises to be a bird and nature-lovers' paradise. The festival, in its fourth year, offers a chance to see more than 260 bird species and this year's featured bird, the Summer Tanager – sure to impress birders of all levels.

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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

Experts will guide you on walking tours, boat tours, owl prowls, trips to the Great Dismal Swamp and islands of the Chesapeake Bay. The entire weekend is filled with exciting opportunities to celebrate the diversity of flowers and wildlife. Don't miss this opportunity to experience the best birding in Virginia!

Visit www.norfolkbotanicalgarden.org to register online or learn more about field trips offered throughout the weekend. Registration is \$40 (receive \$10 off if you register before April 9). For more information or to register by phone call 757-441-5838.

Norfolk Botanical Garden is located at
6700 Azalea Garden Road, Exit 279 from I-64.

Garden hours are 9 am-5 pm daily.

Admission is \$6/adults, \$5/seniors, \$4/children (6-16), and children under 5 free. Boat tours are \$3 (Children under 5 free). For more information, contact Norfolk Botanical Garden at (757) 441-5838.

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

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

MARCH EVENTS

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

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

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.

March 20—Saturday—8:00 a.m. Field Trip

Allens Fresh and Cobb Island, Charles County.

Winter Land and Water Birds. Leader: George Jett (301-843-3524). Two-thirds day trip. Twelve birders (reservations required) will explore the natural areas between Allen's Fresh and Cobb Island. There will be a number of stops along the way looking for waterfowl, woodpeckers, and sparrows as target groups. Bring scopes if you have them, food and drinks for this 2/3 day trip. Please call the leader at 301-843-3524 or email him at gmjett@comcast.net for reservations. Meet in the shopping center parking lot in La Plata on the northwest corner of Rt. 301 and Rt. 6.

March 27—Saturday—9:00 a.m. Field Trip

Cove Point and Hellen Creek, Calvert County.

Winter Land and Water Birds. Leader: Sue Hamilton (410-586-1494). Half day trip. Meet in the parking lot of the Calvert Marine Museum. Visit a nature preserve off the Patuxent River, and cross the county to visit the old site of the Cove Point Lighthouse for views of the Chesapeake Bay. Call leader for reservations before March 13. Limit of 12. Van fee of \$3 applies.

April 3—Saturday—8:00 a.m. Field Trip

Patuxent River Naval Air Station, St. Mary's County.

Migrants and Shorebirds. Leader: Doug Lister (301-342-3670). Half day trip. Meet at the Park-N-Ride lot adjacent to the old Lexington Park Library on Tulagi Place in Lexington Park. The Patuxent River NAS has a variety of habitats well suited for migrants and shorebirds. **Call the leader for reservations before March 20.**

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.

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

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