

Donate Your Old Optics to Birders' Exchange

by Jane Kostenko and the American Birding Association

Researchers, educators, and conservationists in Latin America and the Caribbean are striving to protect birds and their habitats, but many are working without the most basic equipment, such as binoculars and field guides.

The American Birding Association's Birders' Exchange program collects donated new and used equipment and distributes it, free of charge, to associates in these countries.

You can help by bringing donated equipment to Southern Maryland Audubon monthly meetings in March, April, and May. Equipment, which must be in good working order (for example, binoculars must be in proper alignment, the focus wheel in operation, and the glass without flaws), includes optics, field guides, cameras, sound equipment, backpacks, laptops, etc.

Audubon members Tyler Bell and Jane Kostenko will act as couriers to take the donated equipment to the ABA convention in Eugene, Oregon, in late May. From there, ABA will arrange for the donations to be distributed to appropriate associates.

Donations are tax-deductible and will be acknowledged by a letter of receipt; include your name and mailing address with your donation to receive a receipt.

Calvert Marine Museum Family Birding Opportunities

by Bob Boxwell

The Calvert Marine Museum is offering two family birding opportunities in March. Pre-registration is required. For details and to register contact Bob Boxwell at 410-326-2042, ext. 45, or at boxwelrj@co.cal.md.us.

March 1 - Saturday - 9:00 a.m.—10:30 a.m.
Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, Maryland.
WINTER BIRD WORKSHOP
Leader: Bob Boxwell (410326-2042, ext. 45). Explore the bird life around the museum grounds, followed by a presentation, and a simple craft. Cost is \$2 per person; an adult must accompany children. To register call 410-326-2042, ext. 45.

March 15 - Saturday - 9:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m.
Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, Maryland.
WINTER WATERFOWL FIELD TRIP

Join Audubon leader and CMM staffer Bob Boxwell in exploring Solomons in search of wintering waterfowl. Cost is \$2 per person; an adult must accompany children. To register call 410-326-2042, ext. 45.

Field Trip Reports

Point Lookout in the Mist - by Bob Boxwell

Maybe not as poetic as gorillas in the mist, but it has its allure. New Year's Day started way too early (strangely New Year's ended too late). But at least one resolution was kept when I did my exercises and went for a walk. It had been eerily quiet that morning and the soft mist combined with the lack of traffic to make a tranquil start to the New Year.

The mist had become rain by the time I crossed the bridge. Would anyone be as foolish as me to even consider going out birding? Ha! Of course there are. I know them. And sure enough Dean and Sandy Newman were there as well as Mike Donovan from PG County. Strangely Marty was missing.

We could not see far on land or shore but what we saw was close. So the birds we did see provided good views. And with the mist it was an interesting take on birding, particularly the waterfowl. At least for me it was less challenging than bright light.

continued on page 2



DON'T FORGET:

- Chances to win any of five deluxe Richard Sloan prints are still for sale. Tickets are available from directors and officers, and at monthly meetings, for \$1.00 each or six for \$5.00. Proceeds from the raffle benefit the Ecology Camp Scholarship Fund. See the November 2002 Osprey for more details.
- The deadline for submission of entries for the SMAS logo contest is May 1. The Directors have received several entries. Do not miss a chance for recognition and prizes. See the December/January Osprey, or visit our website for details.
- Teachers, your scholarship applications for this Summer's Audubon Ecology Camp are due no later than March 24, 2003 to Millie Kriemelmeyer. See the December / January Osprey for details.
- If you'd rather receive *The Osprey* electronically, contact Bob Boxwell at bobboxwell@hotmail.com.

The rain held off for the entire trip. We managed to find some 22 species, which included both swans, Surf Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Long-tailed Duck, Horned Grebe, and Common Loon. Not a great start to the New Year, but much better than sleeping off previous night's celebration. Nice company and good birds. Actually that is a great start to the New Year.

Indian Creek Field Trip - by Bob Boxwell

I had never been to the Indian Creek Natural Resources Management Area and was curious to see what it was like. George Jett was leading a field trip there on February 3rd. so it looked like an excellent opportunity. Fortunately I have driven by the site many times and knew to turn (about a mile from the bridge on the south side) even though there was no sign (knocked down) to direct me.

We had a nice mix of the old hands and new comers and ended up with a dozen birders. While we waited for people to arrive, we tuned into the birds flitting around (Song Sparrows mostly) and caught a flock of Tree Sparrows and a single American Pipit fly-over. And speaking of fly-overs, lots of geese were doing just that. All Canada from what we could see, but some nice size flocks. We started down the trails from there, continuing to add birds as we walked. Things were fairly quiet, but the sun was out and the wind was down so it was pleasant.

We managed to find all three mimics eventually, with three Brown Thrashers. Discussion of chip notes comparing sparrows, cardinals, and thrashers was instructive (George normally is). A brief flurry of excitement ensued when a Merlin swooped by and into the brush. Needless to say the birds that hadn't immediately departed got very quiet. The falcon was our best bird of prey, but we also had two Bald Eagles as well as both vultures, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks.

Continuing along the field edges we decided to head to the water. At this point the ground had begun to thaw and the process of fields turning to mud soup commenced. Trudging 'cross the tundra mile after mile (sorry a Frank Zappa reference) we finally reached the creek and then the river. It was worth the effort. Canvasback, Ruddy Ducks, Common Goldeneye, American Coot, Pied-billed Grebe, both swans, and Bufflehead were among the waterbirds.

We finally headed back towards the parking lot with several of us wandering in different directions. Not everyone had stayed for the final trek to the water, but I was inspired to get back quickly because my belly was grumbling and I just knew there would be something waiting. Sure enough a wrapped loaf of banana bread was waiting on my car hood. Bless you ladies.

When the rest of the group reached us, George tallied the birds while I offered the bread. Fifty-one species for the day was the mark we set. Not bad for a winter day and certainly a great place to come back and visit. I wonder who has it for the Breeding Bird Atlas?

Prince George Mid-Winter Bird Count

by George Wilmot

On Sunday, January 19, a group of eight birders, mostly all from Charles County helped with the annual PG Mid-Winter Count. This group covered the southwest section of PG County, the area west of Rt. 5 to the Potomac River from the District line south to Charles County. For this section of the count, the totals were 3898 birds and 68 species. Last year's totals were 7466 birds and 64 species. The 2002 numbers were higher because of the higher numbers of ducks. Canada Geese numbers were higher this year – 1223 compared to 745 in 2002. This area of PG County along the tidal Potomac with several tidal sections of tributary streams is a good area to see wintering waterfowl. Other species with high numbers compared to last year were Robins 302 (13 in 2002) and Juncos 203 (124 in 2002). Of the owls, only the Barred Owl (2) was found. Numbers of migrant winter forests birds (e.g., Golden-crowned Kinglets, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers) found in this section on these counts tend to be low, perhaps because the group does not cover enough of the forest interiors.

Nominations For Conservation Award

by George Wilmot

Starting in 1993, the Southern Audubon Society has given its annual Conservationist of the Year Award to an individual who has made significant contributions to the protection and conservation of the great natural resources of southern Maryland. Over the past ten years, SMAS has given seven awards with none given in 1995, 1997 and 2000. Except for Chandler Robbins, who received our 1996 award, all of our award recipients have been southern Marylanders.

We are seeking nominations for our 2003 award. The award will be given to an individual who has achieved much in protecting and conserving the natural resources of southern Maryland through civic activism, nature studies, land preservation, interaction with local, state or federal governments, restoration projects, etc. Nominees cannot be current officers or board members of SMAS. Nominations should be submitted with about a one-page write-up of the conservation achievements of the nominee. Nominations should be mailed to SMAS, P.O. Box 181, Bryans Road, MD 20616 or emailed to our Conservation Chair, George Wilmot, at gwilmot@radix.net. Please get your nominations in to us by mid-April so that our board will have adequate time to review them and select the award winner. The award will be presented at our annual meeting in June.

An Attack of the 'Blues'

by Alice Hall

Let me say at the onset, I am a novice birder. Although I have been a member of SMAS for many years, I have never been on a field trip, nor part of a 'count', have attended only one meeting, and in general, probably a poor example of a member. But I love birds and enjoy their company, sometimes more than humans. So why do I dare submit this article? Blame it on Bob. During a conversation with him recently, when I called for suggestions on what to feed my bluebirds as I had run out of worms and my supplier was also out of stock, I explained to him how upset the birds were getting, that they were staring at me through the window and banging on it, and then parading on the railing like they were on sentry duty. He offered some ideas that were helpful and then suggested I send something in to the newsletter. So just 'blame it on Bob'.

I have a number of nesting boxes for bluebirds and over the years have been pretty successful each season in having several broods from each box. However, one experience stands out from all the others and I call it 'the attack of the blues'. One morning, I was watching the babies fledge one by one. The whole 'bird neighborhood' seemed to be in on the occasion, because a cardinal was watching from one tree and several chickadees were hanging out, too. The cardinal seemed to be cheering them on and saying, "Come on out, the world is fine. You can do it."

I had watched four leave the box and make it to the holly tree nearby. As each one made it, they became part of the cheering squad for the ones remaining. I knew there was one more to go but I had a meeting to get to and had to leave. When I returned, I went to the box just to check it out. Sure enough the last one was gone. As I was returning to the porch, oops, right at my feet was a baby in the path.

Ahh", I thought, "I'll just get you out of the path and under a leaf until you can get up in the tree". As I raised up with the baby in my hands, Bang! Something hit me in the back of my head. Of course I dropped the bird and there, flapping in my face, was Mr. Blue! I leaned over to try again, raised up, and Wham! This time in my back. "OK, OK, I get the message" I said. I went inside the porch and watched; it wasn't many minutes before Mom and Pop had their last baby up in the tree with all the rest.

This is just a taste of the fun and adventure that can be found in your own backyard. When I look out my window first thing on a frosty morning and see two majestic Eagles perched on the osprey stand surveying their domain, it brings a sense of pure joy. Yes, I may not know all their names but they don't care and neither do I; I just enjoy their beauty and the feeling of peace they bring to my "Sunset View" on Mill Creek.

Potomac River Cleanup, April 5th

by Bob Lukinic, Site Coordinator

It is time again for our membership to come to the help of our waterways. The annual Potomac River Cleanup will be on Saturday, April 5th from 9: a.m. to 12 noon rain or shine. The Southern Maryland Audubon Society, as in many previous years, is sponsoring the cleanup at Marshall Hall. The site is located at the westernmost end of Rt. 227 approximately 5 miles from Rt. 210 at Bryans Road, Charles County.

Every year after the volunteers are done there is such a great difference in the appearance, safety, and usefulness of the shoreline. The waterfront at Marshall Hall has progressively become less littered from the cumulative effect of the yearly cleanup. SMAS members, along with volunteers from the community, can take pride that this one-day-a-year effort has helped heal the river.

Gloves, trash bags, drinks, and snacks will be provided. So remember April 5th and we hope to see you there. For more information call Bob Lukinic at 301-283-6317.

The Salton Sea

by Tyler Bell

Jane and I had the good fortune to work the American Birding Association conference at the Salton Sea in southern California in January 2003. We left the house early on Saturday morning in time for the cold from the Alberta Clipper to give us the full effect of temps in the teens and gusty wind. After landing in San Diego, we started peeling layers off in the warmth of a typical southern California winter day. We got our rental and headed east toward the Salton Sea. Traffic in California is something else. Despite the amount of cars on the freeway, everyone moves in synchrony at amazing speed. Surprisingly, when you use your turn signal, people actually let you in!

We crossed over the mountains and began to descend into the Imperial Valley. On the eastern edge of the Vallecito Mountains, I-8 dips toward the Mexican border and is probably only a mile or two away at best. Here we found a group of border patrol vehicles accompanied by a helicopter attempting to find people hidden among the large boulders. Soon, we descended below sea level where we would be for the next week.

For those who don't know the history of the Salton Sea, it was created by an accident in 1901. In an attempt to bring more water to the Imperial Valley from the Colorado River, the California Development Company enlarged a canal, which then breached during heavy flooding. The breach was not sealed for years and by then, the Salton Sea was formed. Historically, the Salton Sea has been flooded by the Colorado River and at one time was an extension of the Gulf of California.

Agriculture dominates the Imperial Valley. This, in combination with a year-round source of water, has attracted a wide variety of birds. In fact, the only reliable place in the US to find the Yellow-footed Gull is the Salton Sea.

So, on our first day of birding, we went in search of a few target species. A few miles from our hotel, we found a field with several dozen Sandhill Cranes. They were bugling in the first light of dawn. Quite an impressive sight! On to the Wister Unit of the Salton Sea NWR. There we found a lingering Gray Flycatcher. Also in the area were a couple of American Redstarts (unusual for California), Abert's Towhee, Verdin, Cactus Wren and numerous White-crowned Sparrows.

We then headed off to Calipatria in search of the reported Ruddy Ground-Doves. This is a bird rare to California and more often, though still uncommon, reported in Arizona during the winter. After much searching, we located a large group of Inca Doves and Common Ground-Doves. We sorted through each bird and finally found one cooperative Ruddy Ground-Dove. All three species of doves had settled down on a stack of bricks and lumber. As we photographed the Ruddy Ground-Dove, we realized there was another bird right next to it. At one point, all three doves were in the same field of view. Very nice for comparing the amount of scaling between species. Inca Dove is scaled across the chest and back, Common Ground-Dove is scaled on the chest but not on the back and Ruddy Ground-Dove isn't scaled on either the chest or back.

Next, we headed west to the Salton Sea. There is a dike road that runs along the periphery of the eastern edge which allows you to look down to the water and see what birds are hugging the shore. Eared Grebes winter in the Salton Sea in the hundreds of thousands. Needless to say, they were everywhere. In shallow areas, there were Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets, Least and Western Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, Willets, both Yellowlegs and Ruddy Turnstones. Occasionally, we would run into a large concentration of gulls and we would stop and scope out the assemblage. All of the groups turned out to be Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. Our final stop was Obsidian Butte where Yellow-footed Gulls had been reported recently. We scoped out the gulls there to no avail. We were just about to leave when Ken Hollinga, ABA conference manager, said "What's that one on top of the rocks?!" Obviously, this bird had just flown in because an adult Yellow-footed Gull has a jet-black mantle, reminiscent of the Kelp Gull that has been frequenting the Sandgates area in St. Mary's County, and is very different from Ring-bills and Herrings. We trudged off down the beach, through piles of dead barnacles, to get a better view. After getting excellent looks at the gull, and some decent digipix, we headed for the Salton Sea NWR headquarters where there were thousands of Snow and Ross's Geese. It's a lot easier to find a Ross's Goose when the ratio is about 40:60 compared to less than 1% on the east coast.

continued on page 5

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

Another day of birding took us to Anza-Borrego State Park, west of the Salton Sea in the foothills of the Vallecito Mountains. We stopped at their sewage treatment facility in search of Crissal Thrasher. Thankfully, this wasn't a life bird as we only heard one bird calling in the dense brush. Phainopeplas, on the other hand, were ubiquitous. We managed to scare up a couple of Sage Sparrows, Black-tailed Gnatcatchers and a Bushtit before we headed toward the Visitor Center and campground area. At the VC we found both Anna's and Costa's Hummingbirds. True to their nature, they wouldn't sit still long enough to get good scope views but long enough to get satisfactory binocular views. In the campground we found Black-throated Sparrows singing among the rocks. A Ladder-backed Woodpecker made a fleeting appearance on a palm.

On our way back to the hotel, we stopped at some hayed fields near the Calipatria State Penitentiary. There was a large flock of Horned Larks flitting around the field. With much work we found several Lapland Longspurs and one Chestnut-collared Longspur. In flight, the longspurs present a much different profile compared to the larks. Horned Lark, to me, appear more pointy whereas the longspurs have a blunt head. They are also a bit smaller than the larks (about 6" compared to 7-8"). So, when the whole flock takes off in front of you, you quickly scan the flock for the smaller, blunter looking birds and pray they land somewhere where

you can scope them. It took us about an hour to eventually find them successfully.

Our final birding day was very low-key. We went to Cattle Call Park in Brawley. Shortly after sunrise each day, a single Zone-tailed Hawk flies in to some trees on the edge of the park, perches for an hour or so, then heads off to forage. So, we pulled into the park, scanned the trees for the dark blob and set up our scope for a look. After satisfying looks, we headed off to a manmade wetland along the New River. The Salton Sea Authority is trying to reduce the amount of nutrients flowing into the sea, from farmland, by creating a couple of experimental wetlands which have proved to be quite effective. At the Brawley wetland, there were quite a few ducks and both American Coots and Common Moorhens. We searched in vain for Least Bitterns which had been seen in the area. Good habitat, bad timing.

On our final day, we headed back to San Diego with just enough time to bird the tidal pools of Cabrillo National Monument. There we found Western and Heerman's Gulls, Pelagic and Brandt's Cormorants and Black Turnstone. As light began to fade, we stopped at an overlook crowded with other viewers to watch the sun slide into the Pacific capping an excellent trip to southern California. Unfortunately, we flew back into temps in the single digits and four inches of snow. Ugh.

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. **Make check payable to Southern Maryland Audubon Society.**
- 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. **Make check payable to National Audubon Society.**
- Please **renew** my membership in the National Audubon Society and the local chapter, the Southern Maryland Audubon Society. **Make check payable to National 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**
 (new/renewal)
- Individual/Family \$20
 - Senior/Student \$15

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

MARCH EVENTS

MARCH 5 - WEDNESDAY – 7:30 p.m.

Monthly Meeting

Garvey Center, St. Mary's County
Leonardtown, Maryland

“The Frogs of Southern Maryland”

John Zyla, *Naturalist, Battle Creek Cypress Swamp*

John has shared his expertise with us on such diverse subjects as cicadas and “champion” trees. At this meeting he will share with us his knowledge of our local frogs, especially their vocalizations which are so much a part of early Spring in Southern Maryland. From Rt. 5 in Leonardtown, go north on Rt. 245 about ½ mile, turn right on Baldrige St. and follow to the Center.

MARCH 1 - SATURDAY - 6 P.M.

Field Trip

American Chestnut Land Trust

Timberdoodle Display Watch

Leader: Sue Hamilton (410-586-1494). Evening gathering. Old farm fields and woodland edges usually provide sightings of several woodcocks doing their courtship displays at sunset. From Rt. 4 take Parker's Creek Road east 1/8 mile to Scientist's Cliff Road, turn right and go 1 mile to the ACLT parking lot on the left.

MARCH 22 - SATURDAY - 8 A.M.

Field Trip

Izaak Walton League/Zekiah Swamp, Charles County

Late Winter Landbirds

Leader: Julie Daniel (301-274-5756)

MARCH 26 - WEDNESDAY – 7:00 p.m.

Board of Directors Meeting

SMAS Board of Directors

SMECO Bldg.

White Plains, Maryland

EDITOR: Dean Newman

44328 Ivy Stone Lane, California, MD 20619

Phone Number: (301) 757-9170

E-Mail: rdnewman@erols.com

The deadline for the Osprey is normally the 5th of each month. Please send all short articles, reports, unique sightings, conservation updates, calendar items, etc., to the above address. If time is a problem, call the number above.

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

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In This Issue:

- **Field Trip Reports**
- **Nominations for Conservation Award**
- **Potomac River Cleanup**