

the Chat



The newsletter of the Montgomery County Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

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President's Chat

What an interesting winter so far. Who can remember a time when heavy snow actually delayed Christmas Bird Counts in our area! We intrepid Christmas Counters are like the Postal Service—neither rain nor sleet nor snow will keep us from making our appointed counts. I was very pleased to see the level of commitment shown by count compilers, sector leaders, and individual counters as they rescheduled count dates, rallied the troops, and got out and counted the birds. Many of us were torn as rescheduled counts fell on dates when we usually do other counts, but we also recruited some new counters. And then there were the deep snow, cold temperatures, and strong winds that affected many of the counts. Everyone deserves a very big thank-you for making this all happen again this year under such difficult circumstances.

As you read this in February, we will soon see our first glimmers of spring, with its promise of returning migrants. But we still have our usual winter visitors around and, I'm sure, interesting rarities as well. It seems that 2009 was filled with rarities all over Maryland (and our neighboring states), and I enjoyed reading reports on MDOsprey as people found them and others chased them to add to life, state, and county lists. Who knows what we will see in 2010!

In May, we will elect Club officers and state and chapter directors. The members of the Nominating Committee will be doing their important work and will be approaching Club members about serving as officers or directors. As you know, we depend on members who volunteer their time to make our Club work. Please consider serving if you are asked by the Nominating Committee.

Looking back, 2009 was a time of expanding partnerships between our Club and other groups working to preserve natural areas where we find our birds, and I hope this will continue in 2010. As we have for so many years, we worked closely with the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) on birding outings and conservation issues, and ANS generously allowed us again to hold our annual Club Social at Woodend for free. In consideration of our ongoing relationship and to help in a particularly tough financial



year, we made a one-time cash contribution to ANS.

For the first time, Club members joined the Potomac Chapter of the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA) in their annual cleanup of the trash left by those who use the McKee-Beshers Wildlife Management Area as their personal dump. NAVHDA has another cleanup planned for Saturday, March 13, and I encourage you to come help (see page 4).

Also for the first time, we partnered with the Montgomery County Sierra Club in an ongoing project to control invasive plants at the Blue Mash Nature Trail. Members of our Club joined members of the Sierra Club one Sunday each month to remove the non-native invasives to help maintain open meadow habitats. Unfortunately, we need to be ever vigilant to keep the invasives under control so we are continuing the monthly Blue Mash work this year. Please come help us (see page 4).

On one of the Blue Mash work Sundays, the Sierra Club folks arranged a tour by the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) "behind the fence" of the closed Oaks Landfill. Many Club members had a chance to take this tour, learning about the technical

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Winter/Spring Calendar

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issues in monitoring and controlling potential pollution from the old landfill and seeing some neat birds as well. On the tour I had a chance to talk to DEP folks about our birding interests at Blue Mash and the landfill. As a result, we have been able to arrange future birding trips inside the fence, the DEP folks have trimmed back some of the growth that had blocked the view of the pond inside the fence on the south side of Blue Mash, and they are considering installation of a viewing platform near that pond.

Going forward in 2010, we have been invited to assist in birdlife monitoring and banding at the Izaak Walton League property near Poolesville and to do bird counts on the Forest Glen Annex property near Rock Creek Park (formerly part of Walter Reed but now part of the Ft. Detrick Garrison). We will continue to explore these and other partnership opportunities.

On the back of this *Chat* is the form to sign up to attend the Club Social, which will be held on Friday, March 12, at the ANS Woodend mansion. This is a great chance for us all to get together over yummy food, share fun stories, and see the wonderful member pictures. I encourage you to sign up early since space is limited. Please contact Steve Pretl if you would like to help with the Social.

Finally, the 2010 MOS Conference is coming up June 11–13 at Washington College in Chestertown, Kent County. Conference information will be coming to you in February. They are working on good field trips for the three days, and the workshop this year, led by Marshall Iliff, will be about eBird. I encourage you to sign up for the Conference.

I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming meetings, the Social, and our wonderful Club field trips. May you see many birds!

—Jim Nelson

February 24 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. “Important Bird Areas: Making the Connection between Birders and Bird Conservation.” *David Yeany.* IBAs guide the bird conservation efforts of Audubon Maryland-DC, and establishing new sites relies heavily on volunteer-based breeding bird surveys known as Bird Blitzes. Hear the results of Bird Blitzes across Maryland and learn about recently identified IBAs.

March 6 (Saturday), MOS Board Meeting. Contact Janet Shields, MOS Secretary, at janetbill@prodigy.net for more info.

March 12 (Friday), 6:30 p.m. Annual Montgomery Bird Club Social, Woodend, Chevy Chase. (See reservation form on last page.)

April 21 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. “Wildlife and History of Five Remote Tropical Island Refuges.” *Doug Forsell.* Howland, Baker, and Jarvis Island National Wildlife Refuges are our most remote refuges, lying within 100 miles of the equator in the Central Pacific Ocean. Doug was manager of these refuges, and those on Johnston and Rose Atolls, for 4 years and is especially interested in the population changes of the two million nesting seabirds since the 1920s. These birds have managed to survive many hazards from man including guano mining, rats, cats, invasive plants, and contaminants.

May 19 (Wednesday), 7:30p.m. “East Pacific Odyssey or ... If It’s Tuesday It Must Be Ecuador.” *Gail Mackiernan.* In autumn 2009 Gail, her husband, and two friends took a cruise from California to Chile. Their primary targets were seabirds, but the cruise’s 12 port stops in Mexico, Central and South America also yielded a wonderful array of landbirds. Gail’s presentation follows their “odyssey” from the California deserts to the mist-filled beech forests of Chile and everything in between.

June 11-13 (Friday–Sunday), MOS Annual Conference. This year’s conference will be held in Kent County, with accommodations at Washington College in Chestertown. Check *The Maryland Yellowthroat* for registration information as the date approaches.

Meetings take place at the Potomac Presbyterian Church, 10301 River Road, Potomac. From the Beltway, take Exit 39 (River Rd/Rte 190) toward Potomac. After crossing Falls Rd (Rte 189), continue 1/4 mile to Gary Rd on the right. Turn right on Gary Road, then take an immediate left into the church parking area. (OK to park in the adjacent elementary school lot as well.) Meetings take place in the Fellowship Hall, ground level. Doors open at 7 p.m. Cancellation policy: Club meetings are canceled if Montgomery County schools have been closed. If you have questions, contact Jim Nelson at 301-530-6574 or kingfishers2@verizon.net.

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Deadline for submissions is the 5th of the preceding month.
Send items to Susan Hunt, 10705 Tenbrook Drive, Silver Spring, Maryland 20901. Phone: 301-530-2807, e-mail: shunt820@yahoo.com.




Field Trips

New Club members, new birders, and guests are cordially welcome on every field trip. Because some trips offer an easier learning environment, we have marked them with an . If in doubt, don't hesitate to contact field trip coordinator Linda Friedland at linnetl@verizon.net or 301-983-2136 (before 9 p.m.).

 **FEBRUARY 7 (Sunday) BLACK HILL RP.** Three-quarter day. We'll focus on identifying winter waterfowl on the lake but look for landbirds too. Short easy walks with car jaunts in between. Area can be windy so dress appropriately. Scopes are helpful. Reservations required. Limit: 10. Meet 7:30 a.m. at the pull-off next to the Rte 121 bridge. LEADER: Andy Martin, apmartin2@comcast.net, 301-294-4805 (h), or 301-529-2066 (c).

FEBRUARY 13 (Saturday) SOMERSET MARSHES. New trip! Full day (to dusk). Bring food, water, and warm clothing. Visit the amazingly under-explored wilderness of Somerset County's marshes. Emphasis will be waterfowl and uncommon wintering species such as Short-eared Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, and American Bittern. LEADERS: Bill Hubick and Jim Brighton. Reservations required. Limit: 14. For reservations and directions, contact Bill Hubick, bill_hubick@yahoo.com.

FEBRUARY 21 (Sunday) OAKS LANDFILL, LAYTONSVILLE. New trip! Bundle up to explore this now-closed landfill adjacent to the Blue Mash Nature Trail. Should be mostly open terrain with some ponds. Possible wintering sparrows, raptors, and waterfowl. Leader will have scope for distant birds. We have special permission to enter this "closed to the public" landfill so reservations are essential. Limit: 16. Meet 8 a.m. Contact leader for reservations and more information. LEADER: Mark England at 240-207-3132 (home) or 240-375-4500 (cell).


 **MARCH 2 (Tuesday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON WALKS UNTIL DUSK.** Joint MBC/ANS trips. Meet at the end of Seneca Road at Riley's Lock "on the bridge" at 5 p.m. After checking out the river, we will proceed to Hughes Hollow. Highlights here will include waterfowl flying into roost. We will try for displaying woodcock if they are in the vicinity. Bring scope and flashlight, and wear "muddy conditions" footwear. Reservations not required. For more info, call Jim Green at 301-208-2393.


MARCH 4 (Thursday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON WALKS UNTIL DUSK. See March 2 listing.


MARCH 9 (Tuesday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON WALKS UNTIL DUSK. See March 2 listing.

MARCH 13 (Saturday) JUG BAY, PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY. Half day. Joint trip with ANS. Possible Rusty Blackbirds, migrating Wilson's Snipe, and courtship display of Osprey. Meet 8 a.m. Call leader for details and driving instructions. Check ANS News for more info. Reservations required. LEADER: John Bjerke, 240-401-1643.

MARCH 16 (Tuesday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON WALKS UNTIL DUSK. See March 2 listing.

 **APRIL 17 (Saturday) BLUE MASH NATURE TRAIL.** Half day. Interesting walk at this relatively new and surprisingly birdy site in Montgomery County. Waterproof boots helpful. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Zion Road parking lot. Call leader for reservations and directions. Limit: 8-10 participants. LEADER: Mark England, 240-207-3132 (h), cell, 240-375-4500.

 **APRIL 18 (Sunday) HUGH MAHANES PRESIDENTS' WALK AT HUGHES HOLLOW AND VICINITY.** Half day. Our traditional Presidents' Walk in a new season! Participation of all former Club Presidents is encouraged, and everyone is welcome. This is a wonderful chance for newer birders to be in the field with "old hands" who enjoy sharing what they know. We will look for waterbirds on the move and early songbird migrants. Possible birds include Purple Finches, Blue-winged Teal, swallows, and maybe even an American Bittern. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Hughes Hollow parking lot in the McKee-Beshers WMA. Reservations required. For more information, directions, and reservations, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson, 301-530-6574 or kingfishers2@verizon.net.

 **APRIL 29 (Thursday) and MAY 2 (Sunday) BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY FOR BEGINNERS.** On Thursday we will meet in Bethesda from 7:30 to 9 p.m. and discuss photographic technique, equipment, and philosophy pertinent to enjoying bird photography. On Sunday we will meet for a field trip from 8 a.m. to 12 noon to photograph any and all birds that cooperate. Limited to 6-8 participants. For more information and reservations, contact LEADER: Evelyn Ralston, 301-493-4132 or evelynsr@verizon.net. Rain date: Sunday, May 9.

MAY 1 (Saturday) PIGTAIL AND TRIADELPHIA. One-third day. Joint trip with Howard County in conjunction with WSSC. Meet at Green Bridge Road parking lot, off Triadelphia Mill Road in Howard County. Variety of migrant and resident species expected. Facilities available (but rustic). LEADER: Joe Hanfman, auk1844@comcast.net, 410-772-8424.

Field Trips



MAY 2 (Sunday) LITTLE BENNETT RP. Half day. Near peak migration for warblers and vireos, including those breeding in this varied habitat. Contact the leader for time and directions. Reservations required. LEADER: Gemma Radko, 301-514-2894.

MAY 4 (Tuesday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. One third day. Early migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Picnic Area #18, one-half mile below the Nature Center on Ridge Road. Limit: 8. Reservations required. Call the leader for more information or specific directions. LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

MAY 5 (Wednesday) EXPLORING CALVERT COUNTY. Three-quarter day. Sue Hamilton will guide us as we cover some of the birding hotspots of Calvert County. Participants will meet at 7 a.m. at the road leading to Flag Ponds. We'll begin at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp and move on to other spots before we stop for lunch on the beach. Reservations required. Limit: 10. Call the coordinators for detailed directions and more information. LEADER: Sue Hamilton. COORDINATORS: Lydia Schindler, 301-977-5252, and Linda Friedland, 301-983 2136.

MAY 7 (Friday) BIRDING BY EAR ALONG THE C&O. The emphasis is on listening, so tune up your ears for this half-day canal walk. We'll be on the lookout for nesting and migrant landbirds. Meet at 7 a.m. at the end of Pennyfield Lock Road. Reservations required. For more information and reservations, call the leaders: Cyndie Loeper, 301-530-8226, or Ann Lucy, 301-229-8810.

MAY 16 (Sunday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. See May 4 description. Reservations required. Limit: 6. LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

MAY 22 (Saturday) HOT SPOTS FOR RED KNOTS. Full day. Joint trip with Howard County. We will start at 8:30 a.m. at the visitor center at Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge and work our way north along the bay. We will also visit the nature center at Mispillion Lighthouse, which offers great views of Red Knots and other shorebirds. We will go until dark or exhaustion, whichever comes first. Bring binoculars, scopes, food, water, sunscreen, and insect repellent. Trip is limited to 12 persons/3 vehicles per chapter. Reservations required. Kurt Schwarz (krschwa1@comcast.net or 410-461-1643) will co-lead for Howard County. For reservations and information, contact co-leader Cyndie Loeper, cyndieloeper@comcast.net or 240-535- 8584.

Improving Bird Habitat



Removing Invasives at Blue Mash. Join the Montgomery County Sierra Club, MBC, and others to remove invasive plants to help maintain good habitat at this great birding site on February 28, March 28, April 25, and May 23. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Zion Road parking lot for two hours of work. Starting on March 28, a beginners' bird walk will leave from the parking lot at 7:30. To sign up for the removal project, contact Mimi Abdu at mimi.abdu@maryland.sierraclub.org, or 301-919-6060. Please bring clippers, saws, and loppers if possible. Long sleeves, pants, comfortable walking shoes or boots, gloves, hat, water, sunscreen, and insect repellent are recommended, as appropriate.

McKee-Beshers Wildlife Management Area. Join the Potomac Chapter of the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA) and MBC to clean up trash left by those who use McKee-Beshers as their personal trash dump. NAVHDA regularly meets and trains at McKee-Beshers, and for the past six years they have spearheaded this cleanup. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides a dump truck, and NAVHDA provides trash bags, rubber gloves, and people power. Last year, MBC joined this effort for the first time. This year's cleanup will be on Saturday, March 13. Meet at the parking lot at Sycamore Landing road at 8:00 a.m. to receive assignments, trash bags, and gloves. DNR will pick up the bags that we leave out on the roads. At noon, back at the parking lot, NAVHDA will provide a quick lunch.





Trip Reports

Blackwater NWR, November 21. Leader: Andy Martin. Eight birders from the Montgomery Bird Club traveled to the Eastern Shore for a fine day of fall birding in Dorchester County. We started at the Cambridge Waterfront, birded Egypt Road on our way to Blackwater, and finished the day along Elliot Island Road. We had good weather with temps in the 50s, a light overcast, and little wind. Birding highlights included nice looks at Surf Scoters and Long-tailed Ducks from Great Marsh Point on a very placid Choptank River and great views of Eastern Meadowlarks and American Pipits along Egypt Road. At Blackwater, there was a nice flock of land birds in the vicinity of the Marsh Trail, including seven or eight Brown-headed Nuthatches, many Golden-crowned Kinglets, and a Pine Warbler. Pool 5c still held a few shorebirds, including a Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and a Black-bellied Plover. We enjoyed nice views of an American White Pelican near the bridge off Key Wallace Drive (a life bird for Diane Ford). After Blackwater, we headed over to Elliot Island Road to look for Short-eared Owls. What a beautiful place! We found two Short-eared Owls flying low over the marsh north of Pokata Creek. Jim Moore briefly got sight of an American Bittern, and we also had a late Osprey and “heard-only” Great Horned Owl and Tundra Swans. Non-birding highlights included a small herd of Sika Deer in an open field along Egypt Road and meeting the nice folks from the Youth Chapter of MOS and Baltimore Bird Club, who also had trips scheduled at Blackwater the same day. Also spotted were veteran MBCers Jane Farber and Jeanne Lacerte.



Lilypons/New Design Road, November 29. Leaders: Gail Mackiernan and Barry Cooper. Results: Nine birders joined the two leaders on a gorgeous, mild late fall day exploring some sites in southern Frederick County. After the rain and wind of the previous week, everyone just felt good to be out! It was calm and sunny, with mid-day temperatures exceeding 60°F. The birds cooperated as well, and we ended up with 48 species for the half-day. We started off along Oland Road where a close-in flock of Horned Larks contained three Lapland Longspurs, seen by all in the scope. The New Design Road/Rt. 85 loop yielded more larks as well as a huge blackbird flock that was dominated by grackles. Back to Lilypons and a clamber through the fence to explore its many pools and pits. Highlights included four or five bright Fox

Sparrows, a single White-crowned Sparrow, and two lovely American Tree Sparrows sitting up for all to admire. Other highlights were four or five Wilson’s Snipe, a late Gray Catbird, and a noisy flock of over 35 Eastern Bluebirds on the move. Fair numbers of Swamp, Song, and White-throated Sparrows were also present. Our final stop was at the Bishop Claggett Center where a short walk along their hedgerows and trails yielded seven or eight more White-crowned Sparrows as well as Brown Creepers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, and a large flock of Dark-eyed Juncos, our seventh sparrow species for the day. On the down side, waterfowl were few, and we dipped on rails and bitterns.



Occoquan Bay NWR, Prince William County, VA, December 6. Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 7. Weather: Sunny and calm, in the 30s—a pleasant contrast with the snow/rain “event” of the day before! Species count: 57. Highlights: An immature Peregrine Falcon, a perched adult male Cooper’s Hawk, two Red-tailed Hawks, a female Red-breasted Merganser, three Hooded Mergansers, 39 Buffleheads, numerous Pied-billed Grebes, and a single Horned Grebe. Ten Bonaparte’s Gulls swam around with a group of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. Very large groups of American Coot and (Lesser) Scaup were far out in the bay, together with smaller numbers of Gadwall. Among our seven species of sparrow, the standouts were an American Tree and a Savannah, both feeding on a grassy roadway, and four Swamp. We also picked up a couple of Winter Wrens and a Hermit Thrush. Eastern Bluebirds and American Robins were present in quantities. We also had a most cooperative Brown Creeper, not commonly seen at Occoquan.



LBJs at Blue Mash, November 14 and 18. Leader: Lydia Schindler. Participants: Ten, including three from an impromptu merge with an ANS trip on November 14, plus two more on November 18. Species: about 40 both days. We postponed the trip because the original date, November 11, was rainy and windy. November 14 was not a huge improvement; it started with drizzle and cool temps—moisture in the air, on the optics, and underfoot.

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Trip Reports

Birding was mostly quiet, including the vaunted sparrows: low numbers, except for Song and White-throats, a couple of Swamps, a couple of Fields, a Chipping. Saving the day, eight or 10 Fox Sparrows, several of them singing their melodious song. Thanks to Jim Nelson's intervention, the willows that used to block the small pond had been cut, giving us a view of eight Green-winged Teal, a Lesser Scaup, and a coot. We saw a perched American Kestrel and a Northern Harrier over the landfill. Many mockers were prominently fighting and chasing. The following Wednesday, November 18, held no rain, but it was cool, 45–55°F, with some wind. This day sparrow numbers were low, without even the small flocks of Song and White-throats of Saturday. Again, the stars were Fox Sparrows—but just three, all perched up but none singing. (However, we were able to cover only the front half of the loop because of standing water.) We enjoyed excellent and prolonged views of a hovering Northern Harrier. The only addition of note was a female Bufflehead on the big pond.



Earliest Bird Walk—Georgetown Reservoir and D.C. Hotspots, January 1, 2010. Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 12. Weather: Cold, below freezing all morning, but the absence of wind for most of the time made it fairly comfortable. Species: 35. The Georgetown Reservoir was unproductive once again this year, with not a single duck. The gulls there were of the usual three common species, and the only saving grace was a nicely perched adult Red-shouldered Hawk. The pond at Constitution Gardens was almost totally frozen and yielded only six sleeping Ring-necked Ducks. The customary Black-crowned Night-Herons were at the roost in the Washington Channel, many of them immatures. Hains Point gave us two Bald Eagles, a Cooper's Hawk, and several close groups of Lesser Scaup. Our next port of call was the LBJ Memorial Grove on the D.C. side of the Boundary Channel by the Pentagon, which once again came through for us, with Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Winter Wren, and two very obliging Brown Creepers. The trip ended with a stop at Roaches Run near National Airport, where there were some Pied-billed Grebes, Great Blue Herons and Hooded Mergansers. Our last bird turned out to be the top bird of the morning—a male Osprey, most unusual for this time of the year, first seen perched, then actively fishing.

2010 Lister's Trip, January 10. Leader: Andy Martin. Participants: Six plus leader. Species: 57. The group worked the western side of Montgomery County to find as many first of season species as possible. The trip was scheduled for January 2, but was moved when the Triadelphia CBC was rescheduled. We started at Violette's Lock, worked our way via Poolesville over to Black Hill RP, and finished the day back at Violette's. The weather was brutal. Morning temps were in the mid-teens and only rose to 26°F by day's end. Birding highlights included fairly close looks at a Red-headed Woodpecker along the canal towpath and distant looks at two Bald Eagles sitting on the ice just upstream of the Seneca Breaks. One of the Bald Eagles seemed to be trying to figure out how to catch a Common Merganser in one of the patches of open water on the river. We also enjoyed good numbers and variety of waterfowl at Black Hill including Tundra Swan, Common Goldeneye, Gadwall, Redhead, Canvasback, American Wigeon, American Black, Ring-necked, and Ruddy Ducks, plus Common and Hooded Merganser.



Eastern Shore, MD, and coastal Southern Delaware, January 15–17, 2010. Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 9–11. Weather: Friday and Saturday: balmy, in the 40s; Sunday: chilly with increasingly heavy rain and wind. Species: 100. Day 1 highlights (MD): A male Common Goldeneye at Kent Narrows; a group of Brown-Headed Nuthatches at Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center; adult Golden Eagle and lots of sparrows at Pickering Creek; Cackling Goose, Wilson's Snipe, Eastern Meadowlark, and two Short-eared Owls at Blackwater. Day 2 (MD): both eider species, all three scoters, Red Knot at Ocean City Inlet; 14 Long-tailed Ducks at 32nd St., Ocean City; Lesser Black-backed Gull at Skimmer Island; 12 waterfowl species at West Ocean City Pond; Black-bellied Plovers, Dunlins, American Oystercatchers, and a Willet at Eagles Landing campground (plus a close, feeding Horned Lark flock containing a Chipping Sparrow); another Cackling Goose in a skein of Snow Geese at South Point; Marsh Wren on Assateague Island. Day 3 in the rain (DE): a gull that may have been a Glaucous-Herring hybrid at Indian River Inlet; hundreds of Canvasbacks, Black Duck, and Ruddy Duck in Silver Lake, Rehoboth; a soggy, perched Merlin and a close flock of Snow Buntings (for those willing to be soaked to the skin!) at Cape Henlopen State Park.





Christmas Bird Counts

Seneca, December 27. The 2009 Seneca CBC was held on December 27 due to the 21-inch snowfall on Saturday, December 19, the day before the scheduled count date. As might be expected, this rare postponement caused many committed counters and some sector leaders to not be able to participate this year. Still, 68 birders made it out and found an unofficial total of 89 species, a little less than usual but still good considering several coverage gaps and a competing Loudoun County, Va. CBC that same day. Last year, Seneca had 108 counters, so the big snow definitely caused this to be an “off-year.” Highlights this year included Red-headed Woodpeckers seen in at least four sectors; a Great Egret spotted by Susan Hunt at Riley’s Lock early in the morning; a female Red-breasted Merganser seen by Harvey Mudd and company, also at Riley’s Lock; a late Osprey over the Potomac; 15 Wild Turkeys seen along the Loudoun County Parkway in Virginia; two Merlins seen by Bob Augustine in Poolesville; and a Rough-legged Hawk seen by Jim Tate at the entrance to the Poolesville Golf Course. The compiler would like to thank all who were able to come out and slog through the wet fields and remnant snow and slush, and to the sector leaders who helped me work through rescheduling difficulties and last-minute recruitment of counters. We can hope for no more weather-related postponements for many years to come and a “normal” count next year. Thanks to all!

—Mark England

Loudoun County (Montgomery County swatch), December 27. Participants: Emily Koo, Beth McClelland, Mel Buchwald, and Anna Urciolo; weather—cold but gradually warming up. Because the Seneca CBC had been rescheduled for the same day, I lost four experienced birders but gained some beginning birders interested in the club. I had scouted the territory the previous day, mainly to check on the state of the towpath and did find a Barred Owl, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and an immature Bald Eagle as species for the count. We gathered at Edward’s Ferry at 7:30 and shuttled up to White’s Ferry. Old River Road still had too much snow on the shoulder so we didn’t leave a car parked there (which would have saved us from walking the last mile which was outside the count’s limits). Beth and Mel birded along the road while Emily and I bravely tackled the towpath, which had some bare spots but more ice and snow that we skated over. We picked up the normal bird lot of chickadees, titmice, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Carolina Wrens. Woodpeckers were out in force with six

species accounted for. The terrain along this stretch of the canal is quite homogenous, but due to the amount of snow still in the field, we decided not to try stumbling through the grassy hummocks, which are bad enough when you can actually see where you’re walking. Still we did find a Swamp Sparrow in the canal. The bird numbers were down from last year. Andy Martin, who was a sector leader for the Seneca count, drove down Old River Road and added American Pipits and a second Northern Harrier to our list. I’m already looking forward to next year.

—Anna Urciolo

Washington, DC, January 2. Like the Seneca Count, the DC count was also postponed. Although January 2 dawned free of snow, the winds throughout the day were brutal, forcing some volunteers to quit the field early. Small songbirds, probably hunkered down to protect themselves from the elements, were difficult to find. Although I have received only a small amount of data, I project that songbird numbers will be low for the count. However, I have received initial reports of a few rarities from along the George Washington Parkway, including two Cackling Geese, two Orange-crowned Warblers, and the biggest surprise of all, a first-year male Black-and-white Warbler. My party found a Gray Catbird foraging berries from a holly tree at the National Zoo.

—Larry Cartwright

Sugarloaf Mountain, January 3. Fifty-four hardy birders braved exceptionally challenging weather to participate in the 25th Sugarloaf Mountain CBC. The combination of low temperatures and high winds made it difficult to spend much time outside, but by the end of the day this dedicated group had recorded a respectable total of 90 species (plus one more during count week). Fifty-three of these species have been seen in every year of the count’s history. Eight species fell to new lows: Mallard, American Kestrel, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Fish Crow, Brown Creeper, and House Finch. Tallies for four species tied previous lows: Great Blue Heron, Northern Harrier, Herring Gull, and Pileated Woodpecker. Two species achieved new highs: Bald Eagle and Cooper’s Hawk. Marsh Wren tied its previous high. Overall, the number of individual birds hit a record low, probably due to the effects of the recent blizzard as well as poor conditions on the day

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Christmas Bird Counts, *from page 7*

of the count itself. Participants thawed out afterwards with a tasty potluck dinner at the Black Hill RP visitor center. Thanks very much to everyone who showed up for this year's Sugarloaf CBC. Next year's count will take place on January 2, 2011, and we'll do our best to arrange better weather!

—Janet Millenson/Helen Horrocks

Triadelphia, January 2. Despite the postponement due to the big snow, the 62nd Triadelphia CBC found 50 observers in the field (34 of them in Montgomery County) and two Montgomery County feeder-watchers. This is better than last year's 45 but still low. We found 84 species—again, slightly lower than the past five years but, considering the amount of ice (therefore absent waterfowl), not bad. This was the first year in at least the last 10 in which the high temperature stayed (well!) below freezing. Number totals are not yet done. Our most unusual birds were a Yellow Palm Warbler (5th appearance on the count), four Double-crested Cormorants on Rocky Gorge Reservoir (second appearance on the count), a well-described Caspian Tern flyby on Triadelphia Reservoir, and a young female Rufous Hummingbird, which we found out about when Bruce Peterjohn and I went to band it on Friday (January 15). The host had strong memories of that bird on count day because she was changing the feeder solution every half hour to keep it thawed. (She has since put up a heat lamp.) Great thanks to all who braved the wind chill!!!! Next year HAS to be better!

—David Holmes

Bird Counts

Anyone can take part in the **Great Backyard Bird Count** (February 12–15), from novice bird-watchers to experts, by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes on one or more days and reporting the sightings online at www.birdsource.org/gbbc/. Additional online resources include tips to help identify birds, a photo gallery, and special materials for educators.

The **May Count** (May 8) provides another chance to count. Wherever you're birding in Montgomery County this day, your backyard or in the field, bring along a copy of the May Count Checklist and keep track of the variety and numbers of birds you see. The checklist can be found at www.mdbirds.org/counts/namc/namcchecklist.pdf. Please submit completed checklist forms by email or "snail" mail to Andy Martin, 3 Thorburn Road, Gaithersburg, MD 20878 by June 15. eBird reports also acceptable. For more info, contact Compiler Andy Martin at apmartin2@comcast.net.

A week later in May (Saturday, May 5), New Jersey Audubon will proudly host the **27th Annual World Series of Birding**—North America's premier conservation event. This event has changed the birding landscape and raised over \$8 million for bird conservation. Every species found, every dollar raised preserves and protects critical bird habitat.

Welcome, New Members

Michele Bloch/Jeff Rubin
Bonnie Coe
Laura Coombs
Stephen Davies/Erika Lamb
Kathy/Roger/Jerrit Erickson
Jared Fisher/Victoria McCallum
Albert and Brady Hartley
Diane Kane
Jim Tate
Sarah Warner
Hanna Weissberger



2010 Nominating Committee

Mike Bowen (chair)
Andy Martin
Janet Millenson

Congratulations to **Diane Ford**, who has been accepted in the Patuxent Wildlife Art Show and Sale at the the National Wildlife Visitor Center at the Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel, Maryland. The show will take place Saturday and Sunday, March 27 and 28. Last year, Diane's illustration of a Least Bittern was selected to appear on the MOS conference t-shirt and pin.



Birding Chile — From Bottom to Top

Four years after buying Alvaro Jaramillo's *Birds of Chile*, my wife and I were finally able to travel with Al to Chile for an intensive three-week birding trip. Joined by fellow MBC member Helen Patton, we arrived a day early for the tour and were able to pick up our first Chilean birds around our hotel at the Santiago Airport: Chimango Caracara, Austral Thrush, Southern Lapwing, Long-tailed Meadowlark, and Rufous-collared Sparrow (an adaptable species found in all parts of the country and at all elevations).

On Day 2 the whole group flew 1,400 miles to Punta Arenas in extreme South Chile, home of our co-leader, Ricardo Matus. Was it cold and windy in Patagonia! We had trouble keeping the scope and tripod upright as we looked at our first set of waterfowl containing such new birds as Speckled Teal, Chiloe Wigeon, Crested Duck, and Yellow-billed Pintail. Kelp Gulls were everywhere (RIP "Shrimpy"!), and we spied Dolphin Gulls, Wilson's Phalaropes, and White-rumped and Baird's Sandpipers, all species that spend the Austral summer down here in deepest South America.

Next day we crossed the Strait of Magellan on a ferry to Porvenir on the island of Tierra del Fuego. Despite temps in the 30s, biting winds, and occasional snow flurries, we all stayed on deck and did our "pelagic thing." Southern Fulmars were common, but excruciatingly difficult to photograph, as were Magellanic Diving-petrels, but we got good looks at Black-browed Albatrosses, Southern Giant-Petrels, South American Terns, Chilean Skuas, Wilson's Storm-petrels, and our first fleeting views of Magellanic Penguins. Driving the back roads of Tierra del Fuego (all the roads there are back roads!), we looked for Silver Teal (a nice rarity), Chilean Flamingo, Black-faced Ibis, Magellanic Oystercatcher, and Black-necked and Coscoroba Swans. Neat passerines included Short-billed Miner, Bar-winged Cinclodes (the first of many Cinclodes species seen over the three weeks), Chocolate-vented Tyrant, Cinnamon-bellied Ground-Tyrant, Correndera Pipit, and Austral Negrillo. But the bird of the day was a gorgeous Magellanic Plover, found after a long, cold hike around a lake in the teeth of perpetually howling winds. Nary a tree was to be seen, and the thought of living in such a barren place was horrifying. And this was glorious springtime! Curiously enough, there were many Chilean Swallows.

The next few days saw us scouring southern Chile for birds, crossing back to the mainland from Tierra del Fuego by ferry, and then heading north for Puerto Natales and Torres del Paine National Park. The cold temperatures and gusting winds never abated. On our way north, we saw a large group of Andean Condors feeding on a sheep carcass by the side of the road, accompanied by Southern Caracaras. Quite thrilling, as were the herds of wild Guanacos and (Darwin's) Lesser Rheas. The many ponds had Coots (White-winged, Red-gartered, and Red-fronted), Magellanic Snipe, and the wet grassy areas had Least Seedsnipe and some wonderful shorebirds—Two-banded Plover and Tawny-throated and Rufous-chested Dotterels—as well as a tight group of 20 Hudsonian Godwits, a long, long way from their Alaskan breeding grounds. Upland Geese were everywhere, always in pairs. We also picked up Flying Steamer-Ducks, Andean and Lake Ducks (relatives of our Ruddy Duck), and several Cinereous Harriers.

Our hotel at Torres del Paine, just outside the park boundary, gave us wonderful views of the snow-covered mountains. In a small wooded area nearby, we ran into Chilean Flickers and Thorn-tailed Rayaditos, reminiscent of hyperactive chickadees, and a number of small finches and siskins. Within the park we found a small group of Austral Parakeets feeding unconcernedly in a tree right next to the Lago Grey hotel. The lake contained huge floating hunks of blue-green ice sloughed off by the glaciers in the mountains above.

On our return to Punta Arenas, we stopped at the Otway Sound penguin colony, home to a substantial colony of Magellanic Penguins. A sharp-eyed member of the group spotted three Flightless Steamer-Ducks on the shingle beach with the penguins. They were perfectly camouflaged, sitting among gray rocks and pebbles. The adjacent area gave us a good view of a Grass Wren and a Common Miner, and the parking lot was full of Patagonian Yellow-finches.

Then we flew north to Puerto Montt, "gateway to Chile's Lake Region," and visited a local reserve, which gave us our first Green-backed Firecrown, Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail, Fire-eyed Diucon, Tufted Tit-tyrant, and close looks at the amazing Des Murs' Wiretail, a bamboo specialist with an unbelievably long tail. Tapaculos are notorious skulkers, but our leaders' tape-playing skills and our collective patience let us see Chucao and Magellanic Tapaculos up close and personal.



Chile from Bottom to Top

continued from previous page

Now traveling by bus, we drove north to the large town of Temuco. Our hotel was right by a hilly and wooded park, which contained a few scarce Chilean Pigeons as well as the vocal but shy Black-throated Huet-huet, which never showed itself despite the best efforts of the leaders. Magellanic and Ochre-flanked Tapaculos were a little more obliging. One side trip from Temuco took us to the edge of Conguillio National Park, but our bus became mired in the wet, pulverized volcanic rock that constituted the road, and it required the combined efforts of the group to extricate it. As a consolation prize, there was a handsome male Torrent Duck standing on a rock among rushing snow-melt water on our return to Temuco. Our next stop was to the east of Chillán. We stayed in the high Andean foothills, and yes, it was still COLD, particularly at night. Birding here was really good and we added numerous species, most notably White-throated Treerunner at a nest, Chestnut-throated Huet-huet (also at a nest!), and our only Chilean Hawk, an accipiter very like Cooper's. The highlight, however, was the discovery of a pair of Magellanic Woodpeckers, a species we had missed down south in Patagonia. The female slipped away, but the male stayed around and gave us camera freaks some great photo opportunities. Probably the best bird of the trip.

From Chillán we drove west to the coastal cities of Concepcion and Talcahuano, where we birded the broad mouth of the Bio-Bio River. Here we saw our first Peruvian Pelicans and Peruvian Boobies, a breeding colony of Red-legged Cormorants, some Blackish Oystercatchers, lots of White-backed Stilts, and a few Black Skimmers of the Amazonian race. From there we flew to Santiago for a few days at the coast near Valparaíso, staying at the ritzy seaside resort of Viña del Mar. Our hotel was perched on the coastal rocks with wonderful views of Valparaíso Bay and of slim and fancy Gray Gulls, Sea Lions, and the wonderful, noisy Chilean Seaside Cinclodes, which never ventures a centimeter away from the immediate coast. The rocks also held Surfbirds and Inca Terns.

We took a morning pelagic trip from Valparaíso harbor on a boat much smaller than those used at home, resulting in a storm-tossed voyage. Numerous Shearwaters and Petrels were easily seen, including Sooty, Pink-footed, Westland and White-chinned, both Southern and Northern Giant-petrels, lots of Cape (Pintado) Petrels, and five species of Albatross, with a Gray-headed Albatross, tame and willing to sit on the water by the boat, the best of the lot.

A Slender-billed Prion was a nice surprise. Several sizable groups of Red Phalarope were seen flying or sitting on the water. Only one of the group was seasick enough to contribute to the captain's chum supply.

Visits to a few reserves and coastal wetland areas both north and south of Viña del Mar produced more good birds: the well-named Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, Spectacled Tyrant, Rufous-tailed Plantcutter, and Warbling Doradito were standouts, and one site had breeding Brown-hooded Gulls and Yellow-winged Blackbirds. The number of Whimbrels on the Pacific beaches was simply staggering. Big groups of Franklin's Gulls and South American Terns were at the mouth of the Maipo River, with a few Elegant Terns. There too we saw Harris's Hawk, a race quite different from that in Arizona and Texas.

Then it was back to Santiago to bird the valleys leading east from Chile's capital up to the steep foothills of the Andes. Santiago houses more than a third of Chile's 15 million population; remarkably, these folks can see the country's border with Argentina along the snowy peaks of the Andes just a few miles east of the city. A landslide that blocked the road prevented us from going up the upper valley of the Maipo River, but we did ascend a nearby valley that gave us access to high-altitude habitat. Here we added White-throated Tapaculo, Puna (Variable) Hawk, Black-chested Buzzard-eagle, Black-winged Ground-dove, Mountain Parakeet, Crag Chilia, two species of Canastero, Moustached Turca, six species of Ground-Tyrant and a nicely perched Austral Pygmy-Owl. On a subsequent day, at about 12,000 ft., we picked up Mountain Caracara, Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, Scale-throated Earthcreeper, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Greater Yellow-Finch, and a Magellanic Horned Owl snoozing away in a roadside tree.

We spent a last morning at a marshy lake area north of the airport. Here we picked up lots of herons, our first Andean Goose, and a pair of delightful Rosy-billed Pochards. Here too was our second Collared Plover of the trip.

—Mike Bowen

To be continued in the next issue...



Birds of Note: October 2009 to mid-January 2010



Highlighting this issue's *Birds of Note* column is an immature male **Bullock's Oriole** found by Dave Czaplak on 11/24 along the C&O Canal towpath, about 1/2 mile north of Sycamore Landing Road. The bird was mixed in with a larger group of American Robins, starlings, and Cedar Waxwings. The birds seemed to be feeding on the abundant berries in the area. Efforts to relocate the bird the following day proved fruitless, but, amazingly, three late season Baltimore Orioles were seen.

Just prior to Christmas, four **Snow Geese** were observed on the Potomac upstream of Riley's Lock by Dave Czaplak. A few days later a Snow Goose was reported by Terry Cummings a few miles from Riley's Lock on the private pond at the Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary off Mt. Nebo Rd. Dave Czaplak found another Snow Goose (blue phase) at Black Hill RP about a week later. Mike Ostrowski reported a **Cackling Goose** at Violette's Lock on 12/24. Another Cackling Goose was reported at Lake Needwood on 1/10 by David Gersten.

Hans Holbrook found seven **Black Scoters** at Triadelphia Reservoir on 11/23. Bill Hubick reported two **Surf Scoters** at Triadelphia on 11/11, and another Surf Scoter was seen at Little Seneca Reservoir near the Rte 121 bridge on 12/8.

Red-throated Loons were observed at Triadelphia on 11/12 by Hans Holbrook and on the Potomac at Riley's Lock on 11/25 and 12/5 by Mike Ostrowski. Jim Green, Dave Young, and Kyle Carstensen were treated to spectacularly close-up views of a vocalizing Red-throated Loon on the Potomac at Riley's Lock on 1/11.

A light phase **Rough-legged Hawk** was spotted perched in a tree at the entrance to the Poolesville Public GC off W. Willard Rd during the Seneca CBC on 12/27. Efforts to relocate this bird the following day were unsuccessful.

Quite a few **Dunlins** migrated through the county in the latter half of October, with birds being reported at Triadelphia by Joe Hanfman on 10/15 and Nancy Magnusson on 10/23 and also at the Summit Hall Turf Farm by Dave Czaplak on 10/16, 10/18, 10/25, and 11/1. Additional shorebirds of interest reported over past few months include a **White-rumped Sandpiper** and three **American Golden-Plovers** found by Jim Moore and Dave Czaplak at Summit Hall on 10/18. A **Black-bellied Plover** was seen at Summit Hall on 10/25.

Laughing Gulls were seen on the Potomac at Violette's Lock by Dave Czaplak on 10/18 and by Joe Hanfman at Triadelphia on 11/24.

A missed report from last issue's *Birds of Note* column was a "seen" **Whip-poor-will** on 9/26 by Dave Czaplak. The bird was sitting on the ground in a wood lot near Black Hill RP.

The flight call of a **Barn Owl** was recorded passing over a house in Gaithersburg during the early morning hours of 10/26.

Paul Woodward reported an amazing total of nine **Red-headed Woodpeckers** at McKee-Beshers WMA on 11/9.

Sedge Wrens were reported at both Violette's Lock and Hughes Hollow on 11/5. Jim Green located a **Marsh Wren** at Hughes Hollow on 10/16.

Gail Mackiernan and Barry Cooper found a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** at Wheaton RP on 10/19.

John Stup reported a **Black-throated Gray Warbler** along the Kingsley Trail at Little Bennett RP on 11/4. Efforts to relocate the bird the following day were unsuccessful. Dave Czaplak found an adult male **Connecticut Warbler** at Hughes Hollow on 10/11. Mike Bowen located a juvenile Connecticut Warbler (also at Hughes Hollow) a few days later on 10/14. Dave Czaplak reported an **Orange-crowned Warbler** along the power line cut at Woodstock Equestrian Park on 10/11. A "latish" **Mourning Warbler** was seen at Violette's Lock on 10/18. Late **Common Yellowthroats** were found by Mike Bowen at Blue Mash on 12/11 and also at Hughes Hollow on 1/11 by Jim Green and Kyle Carstensen.

Lingering **Chipping Sparrows** were reported in December at the Germantown Soccerplex, a backyard feeder in Gaithersburg, and the Poolesville Golf Course. **American Tree Sparrows** were seen near the boat ramp at Black Hill RP on 11/26 by Dave Czaplak and along Batchellor's Forest Rd during the Triadelphia CBC on 1/2.

2009 Wrap-up

According to eBird (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird>), a total of 237 species were found in Montgomery County in 2009. Additional species seen in the county during the year but not reported on eBird include **Glossy Ibis, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Ruddy Turnstone, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Cormorant, Whip-poor-will, Orange-crowned Warbler, Bullock's Oriole, Red Crossbill, and Common Redpoll**, bringing the year total to 247.

Good birding!

—Andy Martin

ANNUAL MBC SOCIAL

Friday, March 12, 2010

Guest of Honor: Gemma Radko

Our social will take place at Woodend, headquarters of the Audubon Naturalist Society, 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase. The evening begins with a social hour at 6:30, followed by dinner at 7:30. The dinner will be catered again this year by Smokey Glen Farm of Gaithersburg.

The evening will feature the traditional members' slide show. Please limit your presentation to your 10 favorite slides or digital photos.

Because space is limited, places will go to the first 90 persons to reserve and pay. **Sign-up deadline is March 3.**

Send this form (or a copy) and your check (\$20 per person), payable to Montgomery Bird Club, to Steve Pretl, 6827 4th Street NW, #123, Washington, DC 20012. Steve's e-mail is stevep@takomavillage.org.

Name(s) to appear on tags: _____

Phone #: _____

_____ Please check here if you would like a vegetarian meal. Vegetarian lasagna will be available.

_____ reservations at \$20 per person

\$_____ enclosed



The Chat
MBC/MOS
P.O. Box 59639
Potomac, MD 20859-9639

