

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

August 2010

Volume 41, No. 3

President's Chat

Welcome to a new Club year! I am really looking forward to these next two years. As I start my term as president, I feel honored and humbled, especially when I recall all the great birders and leaders who have preceded me here. At the same time, I'm very glad to be working with an outstanding team of officers, directors, and committee chairs. It represents a wealth of experience and expertise, ready to charge into the new birding year.

The team has already been working hard to put together an outstanding "agenda" for the year. Our new Vice President **Anna Urciolo** has lined up a diverse group of fine speakers for our monthly meetings. And Field Trip Coordinator **Linda Friedland** has organized a rich and extensive schedule of trips to near and far.

Beyond the meetings and field trips, the Club offers initiatives and volunteer opportunities by which you can get involved in new ways. For instance, starting under **Jim Nelson's** leadership we have joined with other organizations to remove invasive plants at Blue Mash and to clean up the McKee-Beshers area. We continue to get involved in a variety of conservation issues as they arise. And we'll continue to look for new ways to bring in younger members and to educate the public on birds and their issues.

Here are two places where we are looking for help right away, in both cases replacing Anna Urciolo as she moves into her new role as vice president:

We need someone to be the "Nametag" chair. This involves making nametags for new members and staying at the nametag table before the meeting begins. It is a delightful job as you really get to meet our members and guests. E-mail Anna (urcioloa@sidwell.edu) for more information about this important job.



We also need someone to take over the task of finding students who can be the recipient of the MOS youth backpack award. We have now successfully offered this honor to students for two years — most recently young Joshua Heiser received the award and impressed us all with his knowledge and poise. E-mail Anna for more information on this job too.

Finally, it's time for all of us to renew our memberships. When you do, please notice the option to receive the *Chat* electronically rather than on paper. If you do this, you will get an e-mail informing you that the *Chat* is on our website. This method has saved the club considerably in postage, as well as saving paper. And the information is always at hand on the site for you to review.

Please give me or any of the club leaders your suggestions or concerns. And Good Birding! ♪

—Steve Pretl

CONTENTS	
Fall Calendar	2
Field Trips	3-4
Trip Reports	5-6
Field Trip Tips	6
Red-cockaded Woodpeckers at Piney Grove.....	7
Welcome New Members/Chit-Chat	7
Birds of Note	8
Meet Your New VP/Year-End Awards.....	9
Beyond the Site Guide - Sugarland Rd.....	10-11
Membership Renewal Form.....	12

Fall Calendar



September 15 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., “Late May: Minnesota’s Other Birding Season.” Minnesota is known as a winter birding destination for such specialties as Great Gray Owl and Northern Hawk Owl. It is also a great destination in late spring where you can find these owls and many other species. *Ed Patten* and *Chris Barnard* will take us from the boreal forests and remote boglands to the rolling prairie-pothole country of western Minnesota and show us pictures of what they saw.

October 20 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., “Protecting Bird Habitats Outside the U.S.” More than 360 species of birds that breed in the U.S. spend significant parts of their lifecycle beyond our borders. The conservation of habitats that “our” birds rely on when they migrate outside the U.S. is essential to their survival. *Matt Jeffery* of Audubon’s International Alliances Program will illustrate Audubon’s approach to conserving these important habitats by focusing on successes in Veracruz, Mexico, home to the world-renowned River of Raptors.

November 17 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., “Aimophila Adventures.” Southeast Arizona is known for such showy species as Elegant Trogon and Flame-colored Tanager. While MOS Conservation Chair *Kurt Schwarz* admits that he did seek out these species, he also took advantage of a summer in Arizona to seek out the ultimate LBJs that make Maryland sparrows look downright garish. Kurt will share his uncharacteristically in-focus pictures of Botteri’s and Rufous-crowned Sparrows, as well as his more-typical grainy and out-of-focus shot of a Rufous-winged Sparrow, plus those gaudy Flame-colored Tanagers and Varied Buntings.

December 15 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., “Birding in Singapore, Sulawesi, and Halmahera — Crossing the Wallace Line.” *Mike Welch’s* birding adventures in Singapore, a modern city-state with several nature preserves, were followed by birding two islands in Indonesia noted for their endemic species.

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 a quarter-mile to Gary Road 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 Steve Pretl at 202-413-8351 or stevep@takomavillage.org.

The Chat is published in February, May, August, and November by the Montgomery Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society.

Editor: Susan Hunt **Designer:** Gemma Radko **Circulation:** Judy McCartney

President: Steve Pretl: 202-413-8351
e-mail: stevep@takomavillage.org

Membership: Helen Patton: 301-588-5418
e-mail: helen@dataprompt.com

Visit our homepage at www.montgomerybirdclub.org

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.



MOS Youth Backpack



This is the second year that the MOS has awarded each Maryland chapter a youth backpack to give to a worthy young

birder. Diane Ford recommended her neighbor, **Joshua Heiser**, so we asked him to write an essay about his favorite bird. His essay was charming and insightful, and so at our May meeting, we presented the backpack to Joshua. He read his thoughtful essay to a full crowd with ease. Joshua not only extolled the Eastern Bluebird because of its striking color (“I could spend a whole minute gazing at the dazzling blue on its back”) but also touched upon the issue of habitat loss and invasive species, always timely issues. We were delighted to present Joshua with this award and have him as a youth member of our club. †

MBC Officers, 2010–2011

- President:** Steve Pretl*
- Vice-President:** Anna Urciolo*
- Secretary:** Diane Ford*
- Treasurer:** Sally Wechsler*

Chapter Directors

- Stephanie Lovell*
- Jim Moore*
- Suzanne Dater
- David Strother

State Directors

- Brad Beukema*
- Mark England*
- Chris Wright*

*Elected or reelected at the May meeting
Note: State Directors attend MOS statewide meetings. Chapter Directors attend meetings of the Montgomery County Council.

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.).

 **August 25 (Wednesday) LEADER'S CHOICE!** Half day. Meet at Riley's Lock on the bridge overlooking the Potomac River at 7:30 a.m. Bring scope, snack, and insect repellent. Trip will cover parts of the C&O Canal and other areas along River Road. All are welcome. Reservations not required. For more info and directions, contact the LEADER: Jim Green, 301-208-2393 or jgreen@smokeyglenfarm.com.

 **September 8 (Wednesday) LITTLE BENNETT RP.** Half day. Meet at 7:30 a.m. to bird some of the trails of Little Bennett Park for migrant and resident birds. Expect to walk 2-3 miles on gravel and dirt trails, with some uphill. Beginners welcome! Reservations required. Limit: 8. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Claire Wolfe, 301-972-4278 or c_wolfe2003@yahoo.com.

September 11 (Saturday) ASSATEAGUE ISLAND/COASTAL WORCESTER. Full day (to dusk). Bring food, water, sunscreen, insect repellent. Focus will be migrant warblers, shorebirds, and rarities such as Lark Sparrow. Reservations required. Limit: 14. Co-leaders Bill Hubick and Jim Brighton. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Bill Hubick, bill_hubick@yahoo.com.

 **September 12 (Sunday) PENNYFIELD TO VIOLETTE'S BIRD STALK.** Half day. For folks who prefer a somewhat later start to their birding, we will meet at 9 a.m. at Violette's Lock parking lot, end of Violette's Lock Road. We will carpool to Pennyfield Lock and walk up the towpath to Violette's. This walk should net an interesting mix of late warblers, landbird migrants, and probably a few first-of-winter visitors, as we scan the skies and river for raptors and waterbirds. If you plan to attend, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson, kingfishers2@verizon.net or 301-530-6574.

 **September 15 (Wednesday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC.** Urban birding at its best with one of Rock Creek Park's "Regulars." One-third day. Migrant warblers, vireos, and sparrows. Meet 7 a.m. at Picnic Area 18 (on Ridge Rd, ½ mile below the Nature Center). Reservations required. For reservations and directions, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

September 18 (Saturday) SNICKER'S GAP, VA. Two-thirds day. Joint trip with ANS. Migrant songbird watching at 7:30 a.m. along nearby Appalachian Trail. Migrant raptors starting about 9:30 a.m. from commuter parking lot near Round Hill, VA. Bring cushions or chairs. Meet 7:30 a.m. at commuter parking (9:30 a.m. for raptors). Make reservation with the LEADERS: Joan Boudreau and Bob Abrams, 703-734-1238. Bring lunch, drinks, rain/wind gear. Call leaders for directions.

September 18 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, JUG BAY NATURAL AREA, MD. Half day; joint trip with ANS. Driftboat on Patuxent River followed by trail walk. Migrant and resident songbirds and waterbirds; Sora likely. Meet 6:30 a.m. at park entrance gate. Bring fee of \$5/person for park program; boat trip can be cool and a bit damp. LEADERS: Paul Baicich and Greg Kearns. Make reservations (15-person limit) with Kathy Wilson at ANS, 301-652-9188, ext 10.

 **September 19 (Sunday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC.** We've expanded our urban bird walks to include those who can meet only on weekends. One-third day. Same great birds: migrant warblers, vireos, and sparrows. Meet at 6:45 am at Picnic Area 18 (on Ridge Rd, ½ mile below the Nature Center). (Note the earlier meeting time necessary to secure a parking spot.) Reservations required. For reservations and directions, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

September 25 (Saturday) UPPER WATTS BRANCH PARK, ROCKVILLE. Half day. Migrant warblers, vireos, thrushes, and assorted woodland residents. Meet 8 a.m. at corner of Princeton Place and Fordham Street. Reservations required. Limit: 12. LEADER: Paul O'Brien, 301-424-6491.

September 26 (Sunday) LOISY GREEN CONSERVATION PARK. Half day. Explore the varied habitats of this relatively new 204-acre Montgomery County park. Migrant/resident songbirds, raptors, waterfowl are possible. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at parking lot on Snouffer School Road, Gaithersburg. Reservations required. For detailed directions and reservations, call the LEADER: Mark England, 240-207-3132 (home), 240-375-4500 (cell).

continued on next page

Field Trips

October 3 (Sunday) LITTLE BENNETT RP. Half day. Everyone welcome but we'll target new birders and focus on some birding basics. Join us for a slow-paced walk listening for and observing common species. Late warblers and vireos, early sparrows, and some raptors possible. Limit: 8. For reservations, time, and meeting place, contact the LEADER: Gemma Radko, 301-514-2894. *There will be a special guest on this trip! *

October 8 (Friday) WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY MIXED BAG. Half day trip looking for sparrows, late warblers, and who knows what else. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Hughes Hollow parking lot. Plan on doing some walking through wet grass in several locations throughout the county. No reservations needed. For information, call the LEADER: Dave Powell at 301-540-8776.

October 9 (Saturday) LILYPONS WATER GARDENS. Half day. Please join us for a joint Montgomery/Frederick County trip to this southern Frederick County hotspot. Target species include American Bittern, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, and a variety of raptors. Meet at Lilypons at 7:30 a.m. Reservations required. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Mike Welch at 301-685-3561 or manddwelch@comcast.net.

October 10 (Sunday) BIG SIT. Join the Sitting Ducks at Black Hill RP starting at dawn and continuing until ? Come for the day or just a few hours. Meet at the dike across the road from the park boat ramp. E-mail the LEADER: Chuck Parker at chparker@access.k12.wv.us if you have any questions.

October 31 (Sunday) OAKS LANDFILL. Explore this now-closed landfill adjacent to the Blue Mash Nature Trail. Mostly open terrain on a gravel road, including two pond views and one hill climb of moderate difficulty. Possible 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 at 8 a.m. For reservations and more information, contact the LEADER: Mark England, 240-207-3132 (home) or 240-375-4500 (cell).

November 7 (Sunday) LOISY. GREEN CONSERVATION PARK. Half day. Explore the varied habitats of this new 204-acre Montgomery County park. Songbirds, raptors, waterfowl are possible. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at parking lot on Snouffer School Road, Gaithersburg, Md. Reservations required. For detailed directions and reservations, call the LEADER: Ed Patten, 301-948-5648.

November 11 (Thursday) LBJs at BLUE MASH NATURE TRAIL. Half day. Blue Mash is hoppin' with Little Brown Jobs, making it a good place to work on the basics of sparrow ID. We'll look for similarities and differences among the common species, like Song and Field and Chipping, while keeping an eye out for less-likely White-crowned and Swamp. This trip is primarily for beginners but all are welcome. For reservations, time, and directions, contact the LEADER: Lydia Schindler, 301-977-5252 or lydiaschindler@verizon.net.

November 20 (Saturday) BLACKWATER NWR. Full day (to dusk). Ducks and thousands of Canada and Snow Geese. Brown-headed Nuthatch possible. Rough-legged Hawk and Short-eared Owl possible in late afternoon. Bring lunch and drinks. Reservations required. Limit: 12. For meeting place and time, contact the LEADER: Andy Martin, apmartin2@comcast.net or 301-529-2066 (cell).

November 21 (Sunday) LILYPONS/NEW DESIGN ROAD. Half day. Wintering field birds, targeting Fox and Tree Sparrows, possibly Sora and American Bittern. For reservations (required) and more info, call LEADER: Gail Mackiernan, 301-989-1828.

December 12 (Sunday) OCCOQUAN NWR, VA. Half day. Bring snacks and warm drinks for the trails. Those who wish can join the leader at a local restaurant for lunch following the trip. We will look for field birds, especially sparrows, and waterfowl. Meet 8 a.m. at the refuge car park. Reservations required. LEADER: Mike Bowen, 301-530-5764 or e-mail dhmbowen@yahoo.com.



Trip Reports



Pigtail and Triadelphia, May 1. Leader: Joe Hanfman. Joint trip with Howard County in conjunction with WSSC. Thirty-nine species were seen, including both Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, four of the local woodpeckers (Red-bellied, Pileated, Hairy, and Northern Flicker), White-eyed and Red-eyed Vireos, a small flock of Cedar Waxwings, and five warblers (Northern Parula, Pine Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Common Yellowthroat). Four Scarlet Tanagers rounded out the trip.



Little Bennett, May 2. Leader: Gemma Radko. We started at the Kingsley Schoolhouse trail parking lot, then crossed the road onto Hyattstown Mill Road, took the Mound Builder trail up to the Bennett Ridge trail and walked that back down to Hyattstown Mill Road on the other side of the park, then back in a big circle. It turned out to be a 4.5 mile loop, so we got our exercise. A definite highlight was a flyover adult Red-headed Woodpecker in the meadow where the Bennett Ridge and Woodcock Hollow trails intersect. We ended up seeing or hearing 15 warbler species, including a few migrants — Blackpoll, Black-throated Blue, and Nashville, as well as the resident species. We got great views of several Ovenbirds, including one walking around on the ground, busily picking up nesting material. New arrivals (for me) included Eastern Wood-Pewee, Great Crested and Acadian Flycatchers, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo (all heard, except for the GCFL, which gave us good looks). We heard and saw the now-resident Common Ravens several times. An interesting non-avian highlight was a beautiful little Ring-necked Snake.



Rock Creek Park, Migrant Warblers Tour, May 4. Leader: Wallace Kornack. I led a tour of the main birding sites at the Park. The five participants were enthusiastic and inquisitive and expressed a keen interest in bird songs and calls. Of the 13 warbler species seen or heard by other birders, the group saw only a fraction, including American Redstart, Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat. The participants were especially attracted to the larger, more striking birds such as the Baltimore Oriole, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Scarlet Tanager. Much time was spent listening to the songs of the Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Ovenbird, and

Wood Thrush, as well as discussing the fine differences in the songs of the Red-eyed Vireo and Yellow-throated Vireo. The Indigo Bunting, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Eastern Wood-Pewee, and Eastern Towhee rounded out the experience.



Exploring Calvert County, May 5. Leader: Sue Hamilton; Coordinators: Lydia Schindler and Linda Friedland. What a wonderful day we seven MBC members had on this trip! The weather cooperated beautifully and so did the birds. Highlights for most of us: great looks at a Summer Tanager; enjoying the 15 species of warblers, including some nice looks at Hooded, Blackpoll, and Black-and-white. And even if we couldn't get them on the ground, the two large flyover flocks of Bobolinks were very nice indeed. For many of us there were several FOY birds: Veery, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Eastern Wood-Pewee, and Blue Grosbeak. Battle Creek added FOY Acadian Flycatcher as well as the expected Prothonotary Warbler. In the end we tallied some 74 species.



Birding by Ear at Pennyfield, May 7. Leaders: Cyndie Loeper and Ann Lucy. This was a beautiful warm and sunny day and the birds were singing. We probably heard more than we saw, which was the point of the trip! Among those we saw — Yellow-billed Cuckoo, two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at Blockhouse Point, Baltimore Oriole, Great Crested Flycatcher, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Indigo Buntings, Scarlet Tanager, Northern Parula, Pileated Woodpecker, and Great Blue Heron. The Common Yellowthroat, Blackpoll Warbler, and Ovenbirds were heard, and Great Egrets were seen in the impoundment. We also spent some time listening to and learning the Northern Parula's alternate call.



Rock Creek Park, Migrant Tour, May 16. Leader: Wallace Kornack. I led five individuals on a tour of the Ridge, Maintenance Yard, and Nature Center. After an unpromising start, the birding began to pick up as the clouds gave way to some sun. At the Ridge, we had a Canada Warbler, Northern Parula, and Black-and-white

continued on next page

Trip Reports

Warbler near the top of a tall chestnut oak. Across the road, we were treated to the song of the Tennessee Warbler and to a view of a female Baltimore Oriole emerging from its nest in a low-hanging limb. On the path to the Maintenance Yard, we could hear the melodic Wood Thrush and the insistent song of the Ovenbird. In the Yard, the group got to see Swainson's Thrush, Common Yellowthroat, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and a number of the more usual suspects. The Yard's locust tree presented Northern Parula, Blackburnian Warbler, and the less often seen Wilson's Warbler. The walk to and around the Nature Center was unusually quiet.



Hot Spots for Red Knots, May 22. Leaders: Cyndie Loeper, Kurt Schwarz, and Peter Osenton, joined by Bill Stewart, a local, well-informed, and charismatic guide. We registered 16 species of shorebirds with a day count of 94 species, thanks to the well-roundedness of the HoCo leaders. Unfortunately, Mispillion/Dupont Nature Center

was hosting a Shorebird Festival requiring shuttle buses from satellite parking, and so, anticipating crowding on the platform, we reluctantly decided to forgo that option despite its historic productivity. Later reports indicated that it was not only prohibitively crowded but also not very productive. Our beach-hopping included Broadkill, Fowlers, Ted Harvey, and Bombay Hook. Fowlers proved the most productive, including a few Red Knots and Short-billed Dows featuring mostly *Griseus* subspecies but a few *Hendersoni*. It also hosted skimming Skimmers, Least Terns, Royal Terns, and Common Terns seen by some. A Bonaparte's Gull was observed and an errant Bufflehead. We had good studies of Least and Semi Sands, as well as dramatic views of Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, an Oystercatcher, and Clapper Rails. Black-crowned Night Herons were in evidence, and a Seaside Sparrow was viewed in the scope. Kurt had an impressive split second — but identifiable — view of a Least Bittern at Ted Harvey. Check out the report on the HoCo website to see a comprehensive day list.

Field Trip Tips

With fall migration underway, MBC kicks off the birding season with an array of trips, thanks to leaders who volunteer their time and expertise.

Let's remember that as trip participants, we too need to do our part. By following these tips, we can help make the trips enjoyable for all.

- Call the leader well in advance for a sign-up trip — and call again if you can't make it.
- Never show up for a reservations-only trip without a reservation.
- Plan to arrive a little in advance of the starting time, appropriately dressed for the weather.
- No pets, please!
- Once on the trail, remember to stay with the group, keep talking to a minimum, and walk with a soft tread.
- Let the leader lead. Don't walk ahead; don't pish. And don't monopolize the leader's attention.

- As you eyeball that gorgeous warbler or thrush, be mindful that shorter folks may be behind you!
- When the leader has a bird in the scope, form a line, look briefly, and move aside so others may enjoy.

—Linda Friedland,
Field Trip Coordinator

Helping the Red Knot

The Delmarva Ornithological Society (DOS) runs a Bird-a-Thon in May every year to raise money to buy shorebird habitat in the Delmarva Peninsula. But you can contribute to this worthy effort any time of the year through PayPal on the DOS website (www.dosbirds.org). For more information, contact DOS Conservation Chair Bill Stewart at hcf2@earthlink.net.



Red-cockaded Woodpeckers at Piney Grove Preserve

To see a Red-cockaded Woodpecker usually requires a significant trek to the south for Marylanders, but the Virginia Nature Conservancy maintains one site southeast of Richmond that shelters the most northerly nesting colony of these woodpeckers in the Atlantic region. Four of us were invited by the Conservancy to see the birds in mid-May while they were feeding nestlings and thus visible continuously during the day.

On a warm Wednesday after two days of stormy weather, Chris Wright, Helen Patton, Steve Pretl, and Sally Wechsler set off for the Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve, a three-hour drive from Bethesda. Our hosts, Conservancy staffers Brian van Eerden and Bobby Clontz, met us at a Virginia country ham outlet (hard to leave that) and escorted us deep into the pine forest to a site where the woodpeckers had a colony of nest holes.

Unlike most woodpeckers, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (aka RCWs) excavate their nest holes in living pine trees. Since snakes and other climbing critters are a threat, they smooth off the rougher bark below the nest site and drill shallow holes above and beside the nest that drain sticky sap all around the hole, making it nearly impossible to climb into. As a result, the nest is relatively noticeable if you know what to look for.

In some areas Piney Grove looks almost like an English park, with towering pine trees regularly spaced over an open grassy expanse. This is a landscape maintained by fire especially for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Today the lack of understory is unusual, but when Europeans first came to North America, it was often the norm. Woods were regularly burned by lightning-caused fires and by

Native Americans who used fire to manage the woods for maximum game production. RCWs were presumably quite widespread then.

For the woodpeckers, the lack of underbrush both reduces the opportunity for predators and increases the amount of insects available for them, according to Clontz, the preserve manager. As a result, the Conservancy regularly burns areas of the woods in cold weather to clean out young trees, bushes, and duff so the native grasses will take hold between the tall pines that are untouched by the low-level fire.

RCWs live in family groups, with younger birds helping feed and care for hatchlings. Since it takes a lot of work to chisel out a hole in a living tree, RCW colonies tend to remain in one place for years at a time. All this and much more we learned from Clontz and van Eerden as we watched the RCW parents and siblings come and go from their nest hole, feeding hungry nestlings out of sight. And when our attention strayed from the hole we could be distracted by a whole repertoire of spring forest birds, including Brown-headed Nuthatches, Red-headed Woodpeckers, and Summer Tanagers.

We hope our visit will be only the first for Montgomery birders. Seeing the birds requires the assistance of a Conservancy staffer because all the nests are in areas of the preserve far from public trails or roads. And a large part of our enjoyment was having two exceptional naturalists available for a whole morning to explain the birds and their needs. Our intention is to work with our new Conservancy friends to schedule a visit for another group next spring. These were life birds for us, wonderfully close to home. †

—Chris Wright

Welcome, New Members

Angela McMellen Brannigan
Jan Dale
Sharon and Adrian Forsyth
Gabriel and Tova Hawer
David and Lisa Orcutt
Bill Wilkinson
Linda, Warren, and Russell Winter



Chit-Chat

Congratulations to **Dave Powell** and **Margie Frankel**, married in May at Gambrill State Park in Frederick! They honeymooned on the Olympic Peninsula (where Dave added four life birds: Vaux Swift, Sooty Grouse, Evening Grosbeak, and Northwestern Crow). †



Birds of Note: April to July 2010

An **Arctic Tern** along the Potomac River highlights this issue's *Birds of Note* column. Dave Czaplak found the bird resting and feeding in the vicinity of Violette's Lock on 6/29. The bird stuck around for a day or so and was last seen about 8:45 a.m. on July 1. An outstanding county bird and a lifer for many who saw it! Interestingly, this was not the first Arctic Tern to show up in the county. Another one was found in same location by Dave Czaplak and Paul O'Brien in May 1999. Other recent tern sightings include two **Black Terns** between Violette's and Riley's Locks on 6/1, and Dave Czaplak sighted two southward-bound **Caspian Terns** at Violette's Lock on 6/18.

A rainy night and morning on 7/10 produced some great shorebird finds in Montgomery. Dave Czaplak spotted five **American Avocets** flying downstream at Violette's Lock, and later the same day, Jim Green found three **Short-billed Dowitchers** in the "big pond" at Blue Mash. The last reported occurrence of an **American Avocet** in Montgomery was a single bird found at Lake Needwood on 7/21/2002.

Dry spring weather made the small pond inside the Germantown Soccerplex attractive to shorebirds in May. Aside from the expected migrants (Solitary, Spotted, and Least Sandpipers; Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs; Semipalmated Plover; and Killdeer), Dave Czaplak found a **Pectoral Sandpiper** on 5/6, a **Dunlin** on 5/12, and a **White-rumped Sandpiper** on 6/1.

Dave Czaplak reported a **Black-bellied Plover** at Summit Hall Turf Farm on 4/26. Jim Moore had eight **Black-bellied Plovers** at Patton Turf Farm on 5/23. Dave found two **Ruddy Turnstones** at Violette's Lock on 5/26.

John Pangborn and Mike Bowen had some late shorebirds at Blue Mash in June. John reported a **Lesser Yellowlegs** in the "big pond" on 6/6, and the following day, Mike found both **Semipalmated** and **White-rumped Sandpipers** here.

Dave Roberts found a **Snowy Egret** at Hughes Hollow on April 28. The bird was also seen the following day.

John Hubbell picked up three new county birds on 4/29 to bring his cumulative county total to an even 250. After "ticking" the **Snowy Egret** at Hughes Hollow, John stopped by the Seneca Creek SP wetlands and located a calling **Virginia Rail**. Moving further into the park at dusk, John briefly heard the call of a migrant **Whip-poor-will**. The following evening, Mike Ostrowski was unable to relocate the Whip, but the wetlands produced two **Virginia Rails**. Mike Bowen reported the **Virginia Rails**

still there as of 5/18. Another **Virginia Rail** was reported by Jim Moore at Hughes Hollow on 5/1. Jim Moore found a **Sora** at Hughes Hollow on 4/24.

Sally Wechsler noted two juvenile **Bald Eagles** at the Conn Island nest site near Great Falls on 6/13.

Dave Czaplak observed a **Laughing Gull** at Violette's Lock on 5/17.

Gemma Radko noted a **Red-headed Woodpecker** at Little Bennett RP on 5/2.

Jessica Bruland noted three fledgling **Common Ravens** along the Froggy Bottom Trail at Little Bennett RP, 4/29.

It was a good spring in Montgomery for migrant flycatchers, with multiple sightings of **Least** and **Olive-sided Flycatchers** as well as an unusual number of **Alder Flycatcher** reports. **Least Flycatchers** were reported at Upper Watts Branch Park on 5/15 by Paul O'Brien and at Brookside Gardens near Wheaton on the same day by Gail Mackiernan and Barry Cooper. Bob Canaille located a singing **Olive-sided Flycatcher** in the old beaver dam area of Upper Watts Branch Park on 5/15. Two **Olive-sided Flycatchers** were reported in the same vicinity the following day. John Stup also had an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** on 5/16 at Little Bennett RP.

Jim Moore found an **Alder Flycatcher** at Blue Mash on 5/16. Two **Alder Flycatchers** were also heard singing at Sugarland Special Park on 5/17.

Dave Young spotted a **Golden-winged Warbler** among a flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers at Smokey Glen Farm in Darnestown on 4/27. **Wilson's Warblers** were reported at Upper Watts Branch Park on 4/30 and 5/15. Jim Moore also found a **Wilson's Warbler** at Little Bennett on 5/15. Jim Moore and Paul O'Brien reported a **Mourning Warbler** at Upper Watts Branch Park on 5/14. Bob Hartman had a **Mourning Warbler** at Little Bennett RP on 5/15. Joe Hanfman noted a possible breeding **Cerulean Warbler** along the Montgomery/Howard County line downstream of Hipsley Mill Road in Patuxent River SP.

John Pangborn had a **Blue Grosbeak** at Blue Mash, 6/17

Chris Barnard found a **Lincoln's Sparrow** on 5/9 while searching for the **Virginia Rails** at the Seneca Creek SP wetlands. A cooperative **Vesper Sparrow** pair again took up residence in a field off West Offutt Road providing good looks during most of April. †

—Andy Martin



Our New Vice President: Anna Urciolo

I was born in a log cabin. Actually, that's not true but Susan Hunt, our editor, didn't say that my information had to be completely accurate. One true fact is that I was born and raised in Bethesda, Maryland, and have stayed close to home all these years. My grandfather, Angelo Urciolo, arrived in D.C. in 1904, hailing from a small town near Naples, Italy. I have always enjoyed being asked if I'm related to Urciolo. Usually I wait until I hear the first name before admitting my relation.

I have taught music to little urchins in county schools and have been teaching at Sidwell Friends Lower School (still little urchins) since my oldest child was born — 27 years. Of course, I started teaching when I was 14. Dramatics is a big part of teaching music, and last fall I milked that attribute by playing the part of Aunt Martha in *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the Arts Barn in Gaithersburg. The last role I had was in high school. I did find it much harder to memorize the lines this time around. Hmmm.

I became interested in birding on a trip to Chincoteague many years ago. What a treat to be able to see large birds

such as herons and egrets and actually be able to identify them easily. I'm still working on those little brown jobs. Family trips driving out to Wyoming and up north to Minnesota and beyond gave me some wonderful life birds. Recent trips have included Ecuador with some MBC and Frederick Bird Club buddies; Peru, which also included visiting my son who was in the Peace Corps; and Arizona and the Lower Rio Grande.

Besides playing piano, I also play the harpsichord (which I helped build from a kit) and enjoy playing Baroque music with friends. Let's not ask how much I practice, but I'm very good at sight-reading music and I can play the "Minute Waltz" in 53 seconds! I do have to brag that both of my kids, Audrey (24) and Matt (27), can play just about whatever music you need.

I was told that one reason I was asked to become vice president was that I was organized. Again, not a true fact by any stretch, but I'm hoping that it will come true. I am already having fun! ♪

—Anna Urciolo

Year-end Awards

At the Club's May 19, 2010, meeting, outgoing President Jim Nelson presented the following awards:

MOS Valued Service Awards

To **Helen Patton**, "In appreciation for her many years of outstanding service as Secretary, Vice President, President, Membership Chair, and all-around 'go-to' member"

To **Linda Friedland**, "In appreciation for her years of outstanding service as Field Trip Coordinator, consistently delivering marvelous trips with great leaders"

To **Andy Martin**, "In appreciation for his years of dedicated service editing calendars, field trip lists, and 'Birds of Note' for the *Chat*, compiling the results of the May Count, and leading field trips"

To **Jim Green**, "In appreciation for his years of devoted service as Chapter Director, Breeding Bird Atlas Coordinator, and field trip leader"

To **Chris Wright**, "In appreciation for his significant contributions as Chapter Director and 'Chapter Chatter' contributor for the *Yellowthroat*"

MOS AttaGal/AttaBoy Awards:

To **John Combs**, "For his furious hacking and slashing, ripping and tearing, and toting and tossing, in his fiercely determined effort to rid Blue Mash Nature Trail of vile invasive plants."

To **Susan Hunt**, "She innocently accepted the editor's job, and in her first year applied amazing journalistic wizardry to overcome countless off-the-wall challenges and produce one excellent *Chat* after another." ♪



Beyond the MBC Site Guide: Sugarland Road

An occasional series of articles highlighting new or overlooked places to bird in Montgomery County

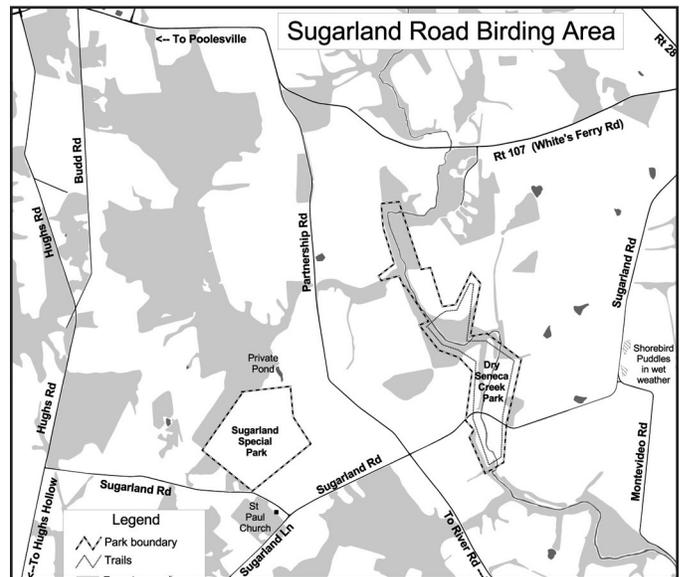
The above title is a bit of a misnomer, Sugarland Road is neither a new place to bird in Montgomery nor necessarily overlooked, but its 4.5 mile length between White's Ferry Road (Rte 107) and Hughes Road provides some unique birding opportunities. It's lightly traveled (at least by Montgomery Co standards), has some good habitat for grassland and field birds, can be seasonally good for spring shorebirds, and is fabulous for searching for birds driven to road shoulders after snowstorms. As a bonus, throw in a couple of overlooked parkland areas to explore, and if you travel the road from east to west, you end up at Hughes Road, which is just a mile or so from further birding adventures at Hughes Hollow and McKee-Beshers WMA.

Grassland and Field Birds

Portions of Sugarland Road can be great for grassland and field birds. Just a few tenths of a mile after you drive away from its junction with Rte 107, a grassy field opens up on either side of the road. This field consistently holds a pair of breeding Eastern Meadowlarks during the spring and summer. They're easiest to spot perched on the utility wires along the roadway.

At Sugarland's intersection with Montevideo, it's worth parking and getting out of the car to do a 360-degree scan of the fields with binoculars while listening for interesting birds. In late spring and summer, listen for the songs of Savannah, Grasshopper, and Field Sparrows; Eastern Meadowlarks; and Horned Larks. The first week of May might yield a flock of Bobolink. Dave Czaplak found a Laughing Gull mixed in with a flock of Ring-billed Gulls in a wet field on the southeast side of Montevideo Road in spring 2009. Utility wires in the area may hold some interesting swallows during post-breeding dispersal and maybe even a Blue Grosbeak. Drive slowly along the metal wire fence that starts around mile 1.2 (from Rte 107) and protects Homestead Farm from the many deer in the area, and check for interesting birds perched at its top or just above ground level. The portion adjacent to the small pond on the right always seems to be the birdiest section.

Sugarland Road is also one of the most consistent areas in the county for White-crowned Sparrows during winter. Best section for these birds is from Sugarland Road's intersection with Partnership Road all the way to St. Paul Community Church.



Map courtesy of Rob Gibbs

Spring Shorebirds

During wetter than normal springs, Sugarland Road has a few large puddles that are worth checking for shorebirds. As a bonus, these puddles form fairly close to the road to provide good viewing through binoculars and great views through a spotting scope. If you set your odometer to zero at the intersection of Sugarland Road and White's Ferry Road (Rte 107), the first puddle is about 1.4 miles down on the left. Scan the puddle from a distance and slowly move closer on foot to get a better look without spooking any shorebirds. I often see cars whiz by this area without disturbing a single bird, but any car acting out of the ordinary (like coming to a stop directly in front of the puddle) seems to put them to flight. Fortunately, if the birds do spook, they will often put down at a smaller puddle about 70 yards away, near the intersection of Sugarland and Montevideo Roads.

From late March through April, scan the puddle edge and the field behind it for migrating Wilson's Snipe, Killdeer, and possibly an American Pipit or two. Toward the end of April and into the first couple of weeks of May, check the puddle for the regularly expected migrant shorebirds: Spotted, Solitary, and Least Sandpipers; Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs; and Semipalmated Plovers. Checking this area during "put down" weather (a rainy, windy day) might yield some less common Montgomery shorebirds like Pectoral, Semipalmated, and White-rumped Sandpipers. Finding a Short-billed Dowitcher or Black-bellied Plover is not totally out of the realm of possibility.





Finally, don't forget to check the wet grassy area at end of Sugarland Lane. This area sometimes holds a shorebird or two. To find this puddle, instead of bearing sharp right at St. Paul Community Church (about 3.3 miles from Rte 107), continue down Sugarland Lane. A couple of tenths of mile down the road and just before the pavement ends, you will see a wet grassy area close to the road on the left.

Wintertime Road-Shoulder Birding

When the weather cooperates, this is one of my favorite types of wintertime birding, and Sugarland Road is great for it. As previously mentioned, the road is fairly lightly traveled, and call me lazy, but there is nothing quite as much fun as driving slowly down a country road, birding from the warmth and comfort of your front car seat with a warm cup of coffee in the cup holder, a birding friend next to you, and flocks of birds along the roadside.

For those unfamiliar with this phenomenon, snow-covered fields and forest will drive birds to plowed roadsides looking for any food available on exposed roadway or ground. After a light snow, get out the following day if you can. The pattern will dissipate quickly, and birds will leave the roadsides as soon as their regular winter haunts begin to return to normal. Optimum birding conditions last longer after heavier snows. During this past winter, Lydia Schindler and I enjoyed a great day of road-shoulder birding about three days after the 15" plus wallop we got in mid-December. We guesstimated that we probably saw between 450+ birds in only three miles.

However, you can get too much of good thing. I had to wait almost a week before checking Sugarland Road after the big, back-to-back snowstorms in January/February this year. When I finally got out, roadside birds were few and far between. Similar reports came in from other parts of Maryland as well. It was surmised by many birders that continuous heavy snow cover either killed birds or caused them to leave the area or possibly both.

Along Sugarland Road, I usually like to start my trip at its intersection with Rte 107. If it's a sunny morning, this will keep the sun mostly at your back or back left side. A cloudy morning will allow good viewing conditions traveling in either direction. Also, a couple of words about safety. Even though the road will be plowed, one should always be on the lookout for icy patches, and although I often bird alone from the car, it's much safer and you have a chance of spotting better birds if you have a friend along in the passenger seat. The birder on the passenger side can devote full attention to scanning flocks for interesting birds along the road ahead of the car while the driver can keep a safety eye out for other cars. When alerted by the passenger side birder, the driver can pull over slightly, stop, and look through binoculars.

The majority of birds will be Northern Cardinals, Dark-eyed Juncos, and White-throated and Song Sparrows, but moving slowly and scanning flocks carefully could yield a variety of wintertime residents including White-crowned, Fox, and Savannah Sparrows as well as Eastern Towhees, Carolina Wrens, Hermit Thrush, and a holdover Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Brown Thrasher, or Gray Catbird. Although it has not happened to me, birders in other parts of Maryland have had success checking post-snowstorm road shoulders for Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings. If a snowstorm happened at just the right time, there is definitely habitat in the vicinity of Sugarland Road that could hold these two birds, and snow cover could push them to the road-shoulders.

If you're working the road after an especially heavy snow (7" or more), it pays to scan fields further back from the roadside for Horned Larks and Savannah Sparrows. Look for these birds wherever you see snow-covered fields with tall exposed weed tips. My theory is that the snow level acts to raise the ground level, allowing these birds access to vegetation that normally might be too wispy for them to perch on and feed from. I have witnessed this behavior in the field across from St. Paul Community Church (about mile 3.3 from Rte 107). Another interesting spot to check is on the right side of Sugarland Road, a little way past its intersection with Partnership Road (about mile 2.9 from Rte 107). A couple of wet spots form that will melt the snow and expose some ground about 20–30 feet from the road. Occasionally, I have found Rusty Blackbirds, American Pipit, or Killdeer in these areas. ♪

—Andy Martin

To be continued in the November issue...





MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL



I/we wish to join the Montgomery Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society, for the year beginning September 2010 and enclose dues for:

- Individual—\$30 (\$10 Chapter/\$20 State)
- Sustaining—\$70 (\$20 Chapter/\$50 State)
- Household—\$40 (\$15 Chapter/\$25 State)
- Life—\$1200 (\$200 Chapter/ \$1000 State)
- Junior—\$6 (\$1 Chapter/\$5 State)
- Associate*—\$8

**member of MOS through another chapter*

\$ _____ **Dues**
 \$ _____ **Donation to Claudia Wilds Fund**
 \$ _____ **Total enclosed**

New Membership Renewal

Total number of Club members _____
(Household, Sustaining, or Life memberships)

NAME(S)

STREET ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

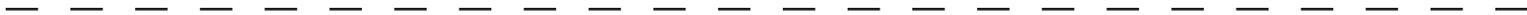
TELEPHONE E-MAIL

Check here if you would like to read *The Chat* on the Internet instead of receiving a mailed copy. We encourage members with Internet access to receive *The Chat* electronically to save trees, and to reduce club printing and mailing costs. You will receive an e-mail message when *The Chat* becomes available on the club website.

Check if you would like to be contacted for work on a committee.

Check if any information above has changed.

Please make check payable to MBC/MOS and mail to:
MBC/MOS, PO Box 59639, Potomac, MD 20859-9639



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

