

The newsletter of the Montgomery Bird Club of the Maryland Ornithological Society

February 2011

Volume 42, No. 1

President's Chat

We all have our own stories about how we came to birding and to the Montgomery Bird Club. Here's part of mine. I got interested in birds fairly late in life. I was 45 years old when I was given a window-mounted feeder. I quickly found that there were interesting little birds in my own backyard that I had never paid attention to — chickadees, titmice, Carolina Wrens, House Finches. Like many beginners, I spent untold hours trying to make every House Finch into a Purple Finch. My little yard in Tenleytown DC even hosted Pine Siskins for a couple of winters.

A whole new world had opened up! Venturing out to the parks, I found other wonderful avians I had known little about — Pileated Woodpeckers, Tree Swallows, many others. I proudly took the family to see these wonders. But still my knowledge and my experiences were very limited. Then I picked up a newsletter from something called the Audubon Naturalist Society. And look, they had free field trips led by experts! I tried some, and I was quickly hooked on group birding. I'll never forget an early field trip to Sycamore Landing where I got 15 lifers! And then in a quantum leap, I joined one of ANS's Paul Dumont winter marathons to the coast. Many more new birds and glimpses of the possibilities of tricky identification.

On that trip, I met members of the Montgomery County Chapter of MOS, who encouraged me to try their club. So here I am. And as the years and the birds pass, I continue to find new dimensions of this hobby. We birders get a lot out



of this obsession — the “thrill of the chase,” an unending learning experience, the fresh air and exercise that come with field work, a greater appreciation for nature and environmental issues, a prod to explore our state and our world.

And for me, another major benefit of birding is the association with other birders. Birding can be done alone, and certainly should be at times. But I find that birding with friends and peers, birders of differing skill levels and backgrounds, is also important. I learn from others, and we all benefit in many ways. Birders naturally form communities, ranging from the folks on a particular birding trip, to this club, to the worldwide community of birders. In community there is support, and joy, and fun.

Good Birding! ♪

—Steve Pretl

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Winter/Spring Calendar

Bird Counts

February 18–21 (Friday–Monday), Great Backyard Bird Count. Anyone can take part, from novices 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.

May 14 (Saturday), May Count. Wherever you're birding in Montgomery County on this day, bring along a copy of the May Count Checklist (www.mdbirds.org/counts/namc/namcchecklist.pdf) and count all the birds you find. Submit completed checklists to compiler Diane Ford by email (dmford455@yahoo.com) or by snail mail (9813 Parkwood Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814) by June 15; eBird reports also acceptable. For more info, contact Diane at dmford455@yahoo.com.

May 14 (Saturday), 28th Annual World Series of Birding. New Jersey Audubon hosts North America's premier conservation event. This event has raised over \$8 million for bird conservation. For more information, visit NJ Audubon's website at www.njaudubon.org. †



Andy Martin Recognized

"Andy Martin is a magician who can pull birds out of a frigid and seemingly lifeless Potomac River" — so begins an article in *Potomac Patch* by Roger Hamilton. To read the article, visit <http://potomac.patch.com> and search "Andy Martin." †

February 9 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., "Important Bird Areas: Making the Connection between Birders and Bird Conservation." 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. From Program Coordinator *David Yeany*, hear the results of recent Bird Blitzes across Maryland, learn about newly identified IBAs, and find out what Audubon is doing to protect our birds and their habitats across the state.

March 11 (Friday), 6:30 p.m., Annual Montgomery Bird Club Social, Woodend, Chevy Chase.

April 13 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., "The World Is Changing: The Future of Maryland's Marshbirds." Maryland is blessed with a wide array of wetlands inhabited by a diverse group of obligate wetland breeding birds, including bitterns and rails. *David Brinker*, ecologist with Maryland DNR, will talk about Maryland's secretive marshbirds, their distribution, relative abundance, and the challenges these species will face between now and 2100.

May 18 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., "Birding in the Great North: Maine, Quebec, and Nunavut." By heading north, *Bob Schaefer* got the chance to see up close some of the birds we rarely get a glimpse of in Maryland — puffins, gannets, and Razorbills along the coast and longspurs and Harris's Sparrows in the tundra. On Bob's numerous trips by canoe down northern rivers, the birds were just one of many attractions.

May 20–22 (Friday–Sunday), MOS Annual Conference. WISP Resort, McHenry, MD (Garrett Co). Join your fellow birders from across the state for the MOS Annual Conference, featuring field trips, workshops, social events, business meeting, and special guest speaker for the gala banquet. Registration forms will be mailed to MOS members early in 2011. Watch the *Yellowthroat* or MOS website (www.mdbirds.org) for details.

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.

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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 6 (Sunday) BLACK HILL RP.** Half 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 at the parking area next to Rt 121 bridge at 8 a.m. LEADER: Andy Martin, 301-294-4805 (home), 301-529-2066 (cell), or apmartin2@comcast.net.

FEBRUARY 12 (Saturday) SOMERSET MARSHES. New trip! Full day (to dusk). Bring food, water, warm clothing. Visit the amazingly under-explored wilderness of Somerset County's marshes. Emphasis will be on waterfowl and uncommon wintering species such as Short-eared Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, and American Bittern. Reservations required. Limit: 14. LEADERS: Bill Hubick and Jim Brighton. For reservations, meeting time, and directions, contact Bill Hubick at bill_hubick@yahoo.com.

 **FEBRUARY 20 (Sunday) OAKS LANDFILL, LAYTONSVILLE.** Bundle up to explore this now-closed landfill adjacent to the Blue Mash Nature Trail. 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 at 8 a.m. For reservations and more info, contact the LEADER: Mark England, 240-207-3132 (home) or 240-375-4500 (cell).

 **MARCH 1 (Tuesday), MARCH 3 (Thursday), MARCH 8 (Tuesday), and MARCH 15 (Tuesday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON WALKS** until dusk. Joint trips with ANS. Meet *promptly* at 5 p.m. at the end of Seneca Road at Riley's Lock on the bridge. After checking out the river, we will head to Hughes Hollow. Highlights will include waterfowl flying in to roost. We will also try for displaying woodcock. Bring scope and flashlight, and wear "muddy conditions" footwear. Reservations not required—all are welcome. For more info, call the LEADER: Jim Green, 301-742-0036 (cell).

MARCH 12 (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. Wear waterproof footwear. Meet at 8 a.m. For details and directions, check ANS News. Reservations required. Limit: 15. LEADER: John Bjerke, 240-401-1643.

 **APRIL 16 (Saturday) HUGH MAHANES PRESIDENTS' WALK AT HUGHES HOLLOW.** Half day. 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. With a variety of habitats, Hughes Hollow is always interesting in spring. We will look for water birds on the move and early songbird migrants. Possibilities include Purple Finches, Blue-winged Teal, swallows, and maybe even an American Bittern. Meet at 7 a.m. at the Hughes Hollow parking lot in the McKee-Beshers WMA. Reservations required. For more info, directions, and reservations, contact the LEADER: Steve Pretl, stevep@tacomavillage.org.

APRIL 23 (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 to 10 participants. LEADER: Mark England, 240-207-3132 (home) or 240-375-4500 (cell).

 **MAY 1 (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 or gradko@yahoo.com.

MAY 3 (Tuesday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. One-third day. Early migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Meet at 7 a.m. at Picnic Area #18, one-half mile below the Nature Center on Ridge Road. Limit: 8. Reservations required. For more info or directions, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

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Field Trips

MAY 4 (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 spend the morning beginning at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp and moving 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 6 (Friday) BIRDING BY EAR ALONG THE C&O CANAL. Half day. The emphasis is on listening, so tune up your ears! We'll be on the lookout for nesting and migrant landbirds. Meet at 7 a.m. at the end of Pennyfield Lock Rd. Reservations required. For more info and reservations, contact the LEADERS: Cyndie Loeper, cyndieloeper@comcast.net, or Ann Lucy, 301-229-8810.

MAY 7 (Saturday) PIGTAIL AND TRIADELPHIA. One-third day. Joint trip with Howard County in conjunction with WSSC. Meet 8 a.m. at the Green Bridge Road parking lot (the Howard County side of Green Bridge Road), off Triadelphia Mill Road. Extensive mudflats may exist with the possibility of shorebirds. Facilities available (but rustic). LEADER: Jeff Culler, cullerfuls@hotmail.com, 410-465-9006.

May 15 (Sunday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. One-third day. Early migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Meet at 7 a.m. at Picnic Area #18, one-half mile below the Nature Center on Ridge Road. Limit: 6. Reservations required. For more info or directions, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

MAY 24 (TUESDAY) WASHINGTON COUNTY: SEEKING BREEDERS AND LATE MIGRANTS. Three-quarters to full day. Explore some of Washington County's underbirded treasures. Some roadside birding mixed with moderate hikes (nothing overly strenuous). Walking conditions could be wet in some areas. We'll visit several parts of Indian Springs WMA, look for grassland birds in the farm country west of Hagerstown, and finish with stops at potential shorebird habitats. Bring snacks, drinks, lunch, insect repellent, etc. Reservations required. Limit: 10. Carpooling strongly suggested. For reservations and directions, call the LEADER: Jim Green, 301-742-0036.

MAY 28 (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 for 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, scope, food, water, sunscreen, insect repellent. Trip is limited to 12 persons/three vehicles per chapter. Reservations required. Kurt Schwarz will co-lead for Howard Co. (krschwa1@comcast.net or 410-461-1643). For reservations contact CO-LEADER: Cyndie Loeper at cyndieloeper@comcast.net.

JUNE 4 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER STATE PARK, Hipsley Mill Road. Joint trip with Howard County. Meet at 7:30 a.m. We will walk downriver with our main target being breeding Cerulean Warblers along the Howard/Montgomery border. Other notable nesting birds include American Woodcock, Yellow-throated Vireo, Veery, American Redstart, Worm-eating Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and Hooded Warbler. Moderate to possibly difficult walking with steep trails, waist-high wet vegetation, and muddy trails, so wear appropriate footwear. Hand clippers can be useful to cut the multiflora rose canes, which are difficult to avoid. No facilities. LEADER: Joe Hanfman, auk1844@comcast.net or 410-772-8424. CO-LEADER: Jim Moore at epiphenomenon9@gmail.com.

JULY 23 (Saturday) DELAWARE COASTAL AREAS: Bombay Hook, Little Creek, Logan Tract. (Tentative date) Join us for a full-day joint trip with ANS. Shorebirds, marsh birds, and some songbirds. Bring packed lunch and drinks. Meet at 8 a.m. at Bombay Hook Visitor Center parking lot. Limit: 15. For reservations and more info, contact the LEADER: John Bjerke, 240-401-1643. Cyndie Loeper will co-lead.

Think Spring! MOS Conference at WISP

Save the dates, May 20–22, for this year's annual MOS Conference in Garrett County. Keynote speaker is Kevin Dodge, president of Allegheny Highlands Conservancy, and the many field trips and workshops will include one on digiscoping and one on birding by ear, with an emphasis

on "migration chip calls." MOS President Mark Johnson will also present "Introduction to Birdwatching" for those of us not yet up-to-speed on chip call ID. For the details, see the January/February *Yellowthroat*.



Trip Reports

Oaks Landfill, October 31. Leader: Mark England. Participants: 14. Species: 42. Weather: Sunny, warm (rising to 60 degrees). On this trip to the limited access, and now capped, Oaks Landfill, which adjoins Blue Mash Nature Trail in Montgomery County, sparrows and raptors were plentiful, with highlights including a Merlin, male and female Northern Harriers, a latish Blue-headed Vireo, and 9 species of sparrows including a late Grasshopper Sparrow (it's the latest eBird county record and the first eBird record for Blue Mash/Oaks Landfill). Its buffy orange face with a pinkish bill and its short spiky tail were seen well through the scope. One surprising aspect of the trip was the total absence of the normally ubiquitous (at this time of year) Yellow-rumped Warblers. Special thanks to Pete Karasik for being our host and explaining the history and engineering behind the former landfill.



Blackwater NWR, November 20. Leader: Andy Martin. Participants: 11. Weather: Fabulous (low 60s and beautiful blue skies and light winds). We started at the Cambridge Waterfront, birded Egypt Road on our way to Blackwater, and finished the day searching for Short-eared Owls along the lonely and desolate Cedar Creek Road. Probably the biggest surprise came at the start of day when Bob Cantilli found a brightly colored yellowish warbler in front of the Sailwinds Park Visitor Center. It had neither the black cap of a Wilson's nor the breast streaking of a Yellow. After some debate, the consensus was on a very late Yellow Warbler. Other birding highlights in the Choptank area included nice looks at Surf Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Common Loons, and a small group of female Common Goldeneye from Great Marsh Point. Egypt Road provided six or seven Savannah Sparrows and a somewhat distant view of Horned Larks (in flight and on the ground). We also spotted the first of as many as 13 Bald Eagles we would see throughout the day. (It's so easy to get jaded on the Bald Eagles at Blackwater!) Further down Egypt Road at Key Wallace Drive, a

flock of a 50+ Tundra Swans flew over, and the group heard a few calls from a Northern Bobwhite.

At Blackwater, landbirds at the Marsh Edge Trail included up to 11 Brown-headed Nuthatch, a few Golden-crowned Kinglets, and a Pine Warbler. A large flock of waterfowl in Pool 3b (mostly Canada Geese and Northern Pintail) also included a few Northern Shovelers, American Black Ducks, a single coot, and Green-winged Teal. A few Northern Harriers were seen coursing over the fields. Further down Wildlife Drive opposite Pool 3c, we spotted some shorebirds (Greater Yellowlegs, Dunlin, and Killdeer) on the mudflat and probably as many as 200 Tundra Swan in the open waters of Blackwater River.

We headed over to Cedar Creek Road to look for Short-eared Owls. We did see three or four Northern Harriers, a Bald Eagle, a few Great Blue Herons, and probably 500+ (gross estimate) Tundra Swans passing over the marsh in nine separate flocks. As we were leaving, with just a smidgen of light left, we caught sight of a possible Short-eared Owl harassing a Great Blue Heron in flight, but it was just too dark to know for sure. Non-birding highlights included a lone Sitka Deer caught in the headlights along Wesley Church Road and some late-season mosquitoes!



LBJs at Blue Mash, December 5. Leader: Lydia Schindler. Postponing this trip from November 11 led to a drop in both temperature and enrollment and perhaps species as well. The day was cold (rising from 30 to 35 degrees) and blustery (gusts up to 30 mph), and there was just a single participant, but she was an enthusiastic and able newbie. We managed to squeeze out the requisite 30 species, many of them first-ers. What a pleasure to be able to show someone their life Eastern Bluebird or Northern Flicker! Only four sparrow species, but that included great looks at several Fox Sparrows. The ponds held a dozen Hooded Mergansers, a pair of Ruddy Ducks, and some Ring-necked Ducks.

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Trip Reports

Earliest Bird Trip to DC Sites, January 1, 2011.

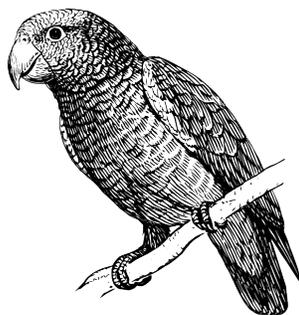
Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 24 (maximum was supposed to be 20!). Weather: Much warmer than in recent years but still with a cold wind off the Potomac; temperatures in the 30s. Species count: 38 (a few participants had over 40). Highlights: Georgetown Reservoir was for once quite productive, with Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, and Hooded Merganser in the small amount of open water and a perched Sharp-shinned Hawk at a distance. The pond at Constitution Gardens was mostly frozen, but we found a few drake Ring-necked Ducks there in with the scores of Mallards. The Tidal Basin was totally frozen, and we didn't visit the DC War Memorial area this year as it is undergoing "renovation" — i.e., the removal of many trees. We were happy once again to

find Black-crowned Night-Herons at their usual roost in the Washington Channel. Bird of the day was a first-cycle Glaucous Gull, sitting on the ice with other gulls right opposite the entrance to the Hains Point Golf Course, where we stopped for refreshments. Shortly after that, we found a perched adult Merlin, several Cooper's Hawks, and a few Lesser Scaup. The LBJ Memorial Grove on the DC side of the Boundary Channel by the Pentagon was quieter than usual (for this trip), but a flurry of activity just as we were about to leave gave us Golden-crowned Kinglets at eye level, a Brown Creeper, and, best of all, a male Pine Warbler. We finished the morning at Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary by National Airport, where we added Pied-Billed Grebe, American Coot, and Red-shouldered Hawk to our day list.

Birding Puerto Rico

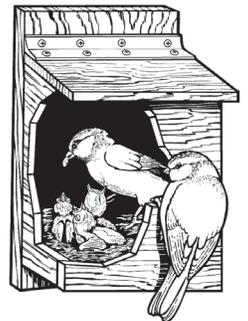


In December Sally Wechsler and Helen Patton went with Wildside Nature Tours on a five-day endemic dash to Puerto Rico. In the five days, 100 species were tallied by the group of five plus the leader, and all but one of the endemic species were seen. (The Puerto Rican Parrot hasn't been reported in the wild for at least a year. They are being bred in captivity.) We drove around almost the entire island, which is about the size of Connecticut, and ate *mofongo*, a local dish of mashed fried plantains. Sally was especially pleased with the numerous looks at the Adelaide Warbler, which has a beautiful call. Helen's special target, the Puerto Rican Tody, was seen on multiple occasions. Puerto Rico is an easy place to bird and is only about a four-hour nonstop flight away. †



Black Hill Bluebird Trail Volunteer Coordinator Needed

Denise Gibbs is retiring as naturalist at Black Hill Regional Park in Boyds, Maryland, and is looking for volunteer help to ensure that the bluebird nest box program will continue successfully.



The volunteer coordinator acts as a liaison between volunteer bluebird monitors and naturalist staff. The coordinator hosts an annual business meeting at Black Hill Visitor Center (the first Saturday morning in March) with volunteers to assess needs and report them to the facility manager. At the end of the season, the coordinator receives, compiles, and reports data to Rob Gibbs, MNCPPC natural resources manager. Compiled data will also be sent to all volunteer bluebird monitors.

There are currently 29 veteran volunteer bluebird monitors and 19 bluebird nest box trail locations in upper and western Montgomery County. Monitors fledge an average of 900 bluebirds per season.

For more information, contact Denise at Denise.Gibbs@mncppc-mc.org or 301-528-3482. †



Birds of Note (early October 2010 to early January 2011)

Dave Czaplak reported five **Surf Scoters** on the Potomac River adjacent to Violette's Lock on 10/4. Another **Surf Scoter** was seen by Joe Hanfman at Triadelphia Reservoir on 11/4. Jim Nelson spotted eight **White-winged Scoters** while boating on the Potomac near Sycamore Landing on 10/8. Diane Ford heard a flock of **Snow Geese** passing over her Rockville house on 11/11. A **Cackling Goose** was reported at Triadelphia Reservoir by Mark Schilling and Rich Mason during the Triadelphia CBC on 12/18.

Dave Czaplak found an **Eared Grebe** at Little Seneca Lake within Black Hill RP on 12/18. The bird stuck around through at least 12/28.

Four **Short-eared Owls** were found at the Oaks Landfill (adjacent to Blue Mash) by Rick Sussman and his daughter Allie during the Triadelphia CBC on 12/18.

John Stup reported a **Black-billed Cuckoo** at Little Bennett on 10/3. Jim Nelson found a late **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** at Hughes Hollow on 10/17. This is the latest date in the fall for a Yellow-billed Cuckoo in Montgomery per Cornell's Lab of Ornithology eBird Project (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird>).

Dave Powell reported a flyby of three **American Avocets** over the Potomac at Riley's Lock on 10/8. Amazingly, it was the fourth time avocets have been reported in the county this year! A **Dunlin** was seen in the "big pond" at Blue Mash by Joe Hanfman on 11/1.

A **Black Tern** was seen flying over Blue Mash on 10/10 by Jared Fisher. A **Black Tern** was also seen in flight near the intersection of Woodfield and Rocky Roads on 10/12 by Brad Lanning.

Noah Kahn reported a **Rufous/Allen's type hummingbird** at his feeder in Silver Spring on 12/19. The bird was successfully banded on 12/21 and determined to be a **Rufous Hummingbird**.

Paul Woodward found a lingering **Gray Catbird** at McKee-Beshers on 1/1.

Gail Mackiernan and Barry Cooper reported a **Marsh Wren** at Wheaton RP on 10/8. Diane Ford found a late **House Wren** at Blue Mash on 1/4.

A surprise irruptive species over past few months has been **Black-capped Chickadees**. Jim Moore reported two **Black-capped Chickadees** at Blue Mash on 10/23, and

one or two of these birds were seen there as recently as 1/1. Dave Powell noted a **Black-capped Chickadee** at his feeder in Germantown on 11/1.

Red-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch, and Pine Siskins were reported from feeders and in the field throughout October and continuing into December.

An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was found off West Harris Road near Sugarloaf Mountain on 10/11. Jim Moore reported a **Connecticut Warbler** at Hughes Hollow on 10/10.

A visit to Green Hills Farm Wetlands yielded a **Clay-colored Sparrow** for Jim Stasz on 10/21. Jim Moore found a **Vesper Sparrow** at Blue Mash on 10/22. **American Tree Sparrows** were seen at Blue Mash on 12/18 by Rick Sussman and on 12/26 by Mike Ostrowski.

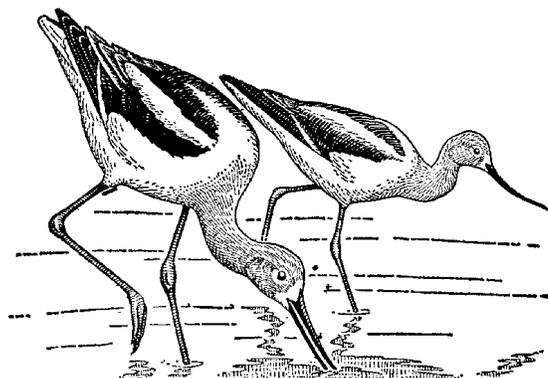
There have been scattered reports of **Evening Grosbeaks** across Maryland this winter, and Paul Woodward found one in Montgomery at McKee-Beshers on 12/23.

2010 County Wrap-up

Congratulations to MBC member Jim Moore who finished the year with a total of 213 birds found in Montgomery County during 2010. County highlights for Jim over the past year include finding **Black-capped Chickadees** and **Short-eared Owls** at Blue Mash and a **Connecticut Warbler** at Hughes Hollow.

According to eBird, a total of 238 species were reported in Montgomery County in 2010 — one more than the total of 237 in 2009. ♪

—Andy Martin



Christmas Bird Counts



Washington, DC, December 18, 2010. Although I have not received all of the data, we had some particularly interesting findings. The teams collectively found at least three Brown Thrashers in an area that rarely produces any during December. Owling teams reported at least eight Barred Owls and an Eastern Screech-Owl, a very impressive number for this count. One sector found a Purple Finch and two Pine Siskins, indicating that a few of the irruptive birds remained in the DC area after the bulk of them seemed to have passed through. Rarities included an Orange-crowned Warbler, a Prairie Warbler, and a Dunlin foraging in the mud flats near the stone bridge south of Alexandria in Virginia. Many common songbirds were represented in good numbers. Robins, for example, seemed to be everywhere. †

—Larry Cartwright

Triadelphia, Maryland, December 18, 2010. The day was as nearly perfect as possible for a Christmas Count: very little wind, temperatures just cool enough to keep the birds active, and enough ice to concentrate the waterfowl. It was a glorious day!! Our 47 counters (29 in Montgomery County) made the most of it. Our unedited totals are 50,715 birds of 96 species. This is much better than last year's 27,098 birds of 84 species in frigid winds. There were no new species this year, but Common Ravens were noted for only the second time and the Greater Scaup and Peregrine Falcon for the third. The four Short-eared Owls seen at Blue Mash were a particularly nice find. The still-increasing Canada Geese were our most numerous species with over 20,000 individuals. We needed more people in at least one Montgomery County territory. Mark December 17, 2011, on your calendar for the next count! †

—David Holmes

Seneca, Maryland, December 19, 2010. As usual, we had about as many counters in the field as species seen, unofficially 93 of each. If accepted, an immature Golden Eagle seen in Herndon, Virginia, would make 94 species. Black-capped Chickadees were seen in two sectors, as were two Merlins. Raptor numbers otherwise were low this year, and both kinglet species were down. Woodpecker numbers were strong as usual, and in those parts of the river that were not frozen there were some good waterfowl counts, including a raft of over 400 Ring-necked Ducks found by John Combs' group near Swain's Lock. Large groups of both Bufflehead and American Black Ducks were also notable. Several Common Ravens were seen, no

longer a big surprise as they are nesting in parts of upper Montgomery County. Seven Purple Finches were seen at the Isaac Walton League clubhouse feeders, and a Pine Warbler was seen by Ed Patten's group. One of the best songbird finds was an Orange-crowned Warbler seen near Seneca Creek by Byron Swift. A tally rally at the Branded '72 restaurant in Rockville capped the day. Thanks to all who participated, and especially the sector leaders for marshalling their troops into the field again! †

—Mark England

Central Loudoun (MD Sector), December 29, 2010.

After a week of brutally cold and windy days, we thought we were going to be blessed with a day in the mid-40s. We met at White's Ferry at 7:15 and then piled into Jim Nelson's car to drive down Old River Road and park one mile upriver from Edward's Ferry. Two counters (Ed Patten and John Williamson) walked the trail through the woods to get to the towpath, and Jim and I started hiking back along the road. Our group picked up the normal lot of chickadees, titmice, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Carolina Wrens. Woodpeckers were out in force, with 20 Red-bellied, seven Pileated, 19 Downy, 17 Northern Flickers, two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, and a single Hairy. The sheltered towpath crew garnered most of the sparrows. Along River Road, we spotted a flock of 20 Horned Larks whizzing by about a foot off the ground. Then there was the Cooper's Hawk flying away with his breakfast. The morning's highlight came after we all gathered back at White's Ferry. A jaunt down to the river found some faraway ducks that were identified as Hooded Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes, and a few Ring-necked Ducks, accompanied by a lone Herring Gull. This is an easy trek, and we would welcome a few more counters next year. †

—Anna Urciolo

Sugarloaf Mountain, January 2, 2011. Intermittent rain showers on January 2 didn't dampen the enthusiasm of participants in the 26th Sugarloaf Mountain CBC, who enjoyed weather far milder than last year's brutal cold and wind. Most ponds were frozen, but streams were open. Preliminary results showed a total of 91 species (plus three during count week), including one species new to this count: Black-capped Chickadee. Reports are still coming in, but it appears that tallies for Common Raven, Bufflehead, and Common Merganser were high. However, although the number of species seen was average, the total number of individual birds may have hit a record low for this count. Thanks to everyone who participated. †

—Janet Millenson and Helen Horrocks



Ducks “On the Fly” at Hughes Hollow



One of the interesting things I have learned since taking up birding eight or nine years ago is how time of year, migration patterns, and weather can come together to concentrate certain types of birds or create unusual birding opportunities. Things that come to mind include checking your backyard feeders for unusual birds after snowstorms, searching wet farm fields and puddles for shorebirds during and after rain, scanning roadsides for sparrows after heavy snow, or listening for thrush flight calls on calm nights with southerly winds in May. Taking advantage of these unique opportunities can turn an ordinary birding trip or day into an exciting one, almost akin to finding a life, state, or county bird.

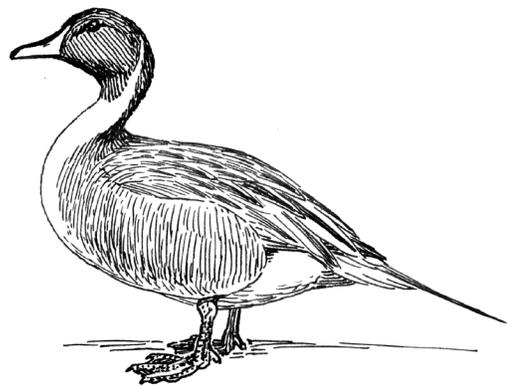
One such opportunity occurs in late February through early April each year — the chance to observe and identify waterfowl in flight. One of the few places in Montgomery County to practice your “duck in flight” ID skills is the dike at Hughes Hollow in the late afternoon. I was introduced to this phenomenon by fellow MBC member Jim Green. For the past four years or so in March, Jim has been running a series of late afternoon bird walks in the western part of the county. Jim begins these afternoon trips on the aqueduct at Riley’s Lock along the Potomac River looking for early migrants and waterfowl. He then proceeds to Hughes Hollow at McKee-Beshers WMA and finishes the day slightly after dusk listening and searching for American Woodcock in the fields along Sycamore Landing Road. When I am able to make these afternoon trips, one of the highlights is the challenge of identifying ducks in flight as they pour into Hughes Hollow from all directions to roost for the night in the Buttonbush Swamp (the northwest impoundment at Hughes Hollow). And usually not just one or two flocks come in, but multiple flocks of several species fly over.

The Buttonbush Swamp is used in the early spring as a night roost by these migrating waterfowl. During the day, waterfowl are spread out in the nearby impoundments, the many wet areas found throughout McKee-Beshers and the nearby Potomac River. Come the approach of nightfall however, many birds leave their daytime feeding areas to roost overnight in the safety and security of the Buttonbush Swamp.

Birds flying into roost at Hughes Hollow include most of the dabblers as well as some puddle ducks. Some of the more common species include Hooded Mergansers, Wood Ducks, and Mallards. Hooded Mergansers and Mallards

seem to predominate in the period just after ice-out in late February through the first few weeks of March. Wood Ducks (a local breeder) increase in numbers the first week of March. At the height of migration in mid-March, species can include Ring-necked Ducks, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Blue- and Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, and Northern Shoveler. Wood Ducks and Blue-winged Teal are the prevalent species as the season winds down through mid-April. April is also the time to look for other exciting birds in flight over the impoundments, including American Bittern, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and possibly an early Great Egret.

The best place to view this phenomenon is from the main dike adjacent to the Buttonbush Swamp about 30 yards past its intersection with the cross-dike. For an excellent map and description of birding opportunities at McKee-Beshers by Paul Woodward, see *A Birder’s Guide to Montgomery County, MD*, page 31.



I’m still an amateur at identifying waterfowl in flight, but some tips I learned from Jim include piecing together silhouette, size, flight style, color, and sometimes flight calls to make the ID. The long tail of the Northern Pintail and the large bill of the Northern Shoveler make for distinctive silhouettes. Neck and wing color patterns can help identify other waterfowl. Female Wood Ducks give a distinctive call in flight. Since most of the ducks are seen shortly before darkness, your first look at a flock will usually be of silhouettes as birds come in high over the treeline against a light sky. Most of the time you must wait for them to drop below tree-top level before you get a few seconds to assess

continued next page

Ducks “On the Fly” (continued)

face, neck, and wing colors as they quickly disappear into the safety of the Buttonbush Swamp.

I have found the Sibley eGuide to North American Birds App for the Apple iPhone or Touch a handy on-the-spot reference. At the tip of your fingers, you have not only Sibley’s excellent paintings of ducks in flight but also information on flight style and calls.

If you want to enjoy this birding challenge, head up to Hughes Hollow in the evening about an hour and a half before dark. Try it on your own or join Jim Green on March 1, 3, 8, or 15 for one of his informal evening trips (see field trip schedule). As a bonus after the ducks slow down, you can head over to nearby Sycamore Landing Road and try for an American Woodcock or two.

Other places to enjoy ducks in flight in Montgomery include the Route 121 (Clarksburg Road) bridge where it crosses Little Seneca Reservoir at Black Hill Regional Park and the Riley’s Lock Aqueduct along the Potomac River at Seneca.

Most years, duck populations seem to peak at Little Seneca Lake between mid-January through late February. The Route 121 bridge gives you a raised vantage point from which to observe ducks in flight as they relocate from one part of the lake to another or when they get stirred up by the local Bald Eagle pair. At this location, you might also see some diving ducks. Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Common Goldeneye, Canvasback, Redheads, Gadwalls, Ruddy Ducks, and Buffleheads can all be present at this location. A Long-tailed Duck in flight is not out of the realm of possibility. On the negative side, it does not take much wind to make things feel really cold and uncomfortable here, and traffic on the Route 121 can be fast and heavy. Be very careful when birding from the road shoulder.

If waterfowl migration and higher-than-normal water levels coincide on the Potomac River, the aqueduct at Riley’s Lock along the C&O Canal can be excellent for ducks in flight. High river levels (seven feet plus at the Little Falls gauge) in March create an interesting situation. Flocks of migrating ducks can congregate on the river from a few miles upstream of Riley’s all the way downstream to just above the Seneca breaks adjacent to Violette’s Lock. However, the ducks don’t seem to like to float into the

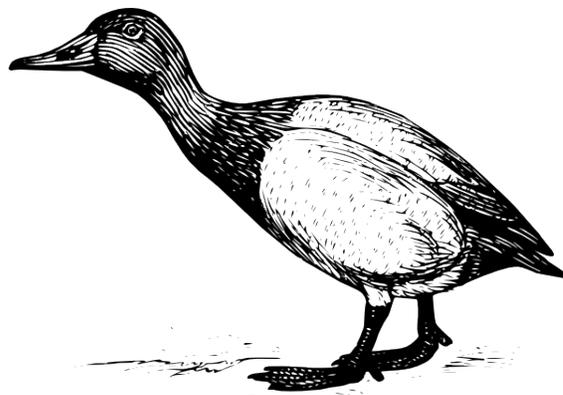


turbulent water and rapids formed by the Seneca Breaks. Fast-moving flood waters in conjunction with large numbers of migrating ducks create a “conveyor-belt

effect,” with waterfowl flocks floating past Riley’s, picking up and taking to the air just before reaching the Seneca breaks, flying back upstream, putting back down in the water, only to repeat the process all over again. You can stand at Riley’s Lock with spotting scope and binoculars and observe flocks of different species of duck (grebes too) pass by multiple times. As you watch the ducks flying upstream, you can also look for rarities among the birds floating past. This is the only place in Montgomery where I have seen both Horned and Pied-billed Grebes in flight. You might also be able to see, compare, and maybe ID both scaup species in flight — a real challenge!

This pattern peaks only when high river levels happen in mid-March, which, unfortunately, does not occur every year. Gauge Potomac River levels at Little Falls can be found on the Washington Post weather page or on the web at <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/md/nwis/uv?01646500>. If you arrive at Riley’s Lock Road only to find it closed by the National Park Service due to flooding, you can access the aqueduct by Tschiffely Mill Road on the west side of Seneca Creek. This road travels to the Potomac River at a slightly higher elevation and is rarely cut off by high water. At the end of Tschiffely Mill Road, you will find a small dirt parking lot. From the parking lot, a path leads to the Canal and Riley’s Lock aqueduct. †

—Andy Martin



Survey Volunteer Needed

Cecily Nabors has been running a Breeding Bird Survey route for over 20 years and is now looking for someone to replace her. The BBS involves driving an established 25-mile route across Montgomery County, stopping every half-mile for three minutes to record birds seen and heard. The observations need to be done only once a year, in June, optimally on a Sunday morning because traffic noise is less. The observer will need to be in place, ready to start, half an hour before dawn. It helps to have someone else drive, both to time the observer and to count vehicles.

The vehicle count was added to the BBS about seven years ago. Because it's a roadside survey, and the county almost everywhere is more congested, the number of cars passing by a person who's trying to hear birds can affect the data. For example, when this route was laid out in 1965, Montrose and Randolph Roads were both two-lane roads. Not only were roads widened and farm fields subsumed in developments, one of the original counting sites became an overpass above 270.

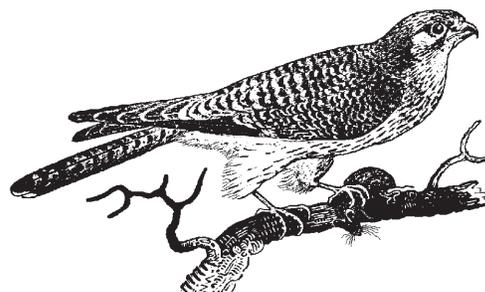
Major qualification needed: good bird identification skills, both visual and auditory. Cecily will be happy to drive the route with the replacement person to familiarize him or her with it. Call 301-460-0060 or email Cecily at cecilou@comcast.net if you would like to help.

Developed by Chandler Robbins and colleagues at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, the North American Breeding Bird Survey is a long-term avian monitoring program that tracks the status and trends of North American bird populations.

BBS data are collected by thousands of participants along randomly established roadside routes throughout the continent. The ongoing influx of data has proven essential in determining trends in bird populations. For more information, visit www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBS. †

Hawk Rescue at the Library

A hawk recently spent a week in the Main Reading Room of the Library of Congress. The female Cooper's Hawk, traveling under the name of "Shirley," possibly got in through a broken window (broken windows in the Library of Congress?!). Attempts to capture her throughout the week had failed, but a team of three raptor experts and two starlings accomplished a safe recovery on the morning of January 26. A cage with the two European Starlings (Frick and Frack) was placed on a ledge inside the dome. The starlings immediately took note of a hungry accipiter in the vicinity, and they froze. But when a noise outside startled them, they moved and Shirley immediately flew onto the cage, where her talons became entangled in nylon nooses attached to the top. After being disentangled, weighed, photographed, Shirley was taken to the Raptor Conservancy of Virginia for some rehab before being released. †



T-Shirt Time!

MOS needs someone to oversee the creation of conference T-shirts. It's an easy task and doesn't take much time. You take the conference pin design to the shirt printer, and select a T-shirt color. Then you take the finished shirts to the Conference site. That's it! If you're interested, contact Johanna Thompson (301-871-3012 or jwth36@verizon.net), and she'll walk you through it as she prepares the T-shirts for the 2011 Conference. †



Welcome New Members!

Jodi Bucknam

Alan Johnston and Anne Cross

Stan Fisher

Gail Joice

Stephen Jones

Natalie and Don O'Reilly

William Price and Cherry Barr

Torre Taylor



ANNUAL MBC SOCIAL

Friday, March 11, 2011

Guest of Honor: Mark England

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 2.**

Send this form (or a copy) and your check (\$20 per person), payable to Montgomery Bird Club, to Anna Urciolo, 8 Leyton Ct., Rockville, MD 20850. Anna's e-mail is urcioloa@sidwell.edu.

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

