

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

August 2012

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President's Chat

Greetings and welcome to a new year. I am your new president and am following in the footsteps of many wonderful leaders. It is a humbling position, but I will be supported by a terrific slate, including our past-president, **Steve Pretl**.

At the May meeting, we held the annual election of officers and directors. **Ed Patten** is our new vice-president, **Sally Wechsler** continues as treasurer, and **Rae Dubois** is ably filling the role of secretary. New chapter directors are **Bill Adams** and **Cecily Nabors**. Continuing chapter directors are **Woody Dubois** and **Susan Hunt**. Our new state director is **Andy Martin**, with **Chris Barnard** and **John Combs** continuing in their second term.

Ed Patten has lined up some wonderful speakers for the year, many of whom are our own members. Of course, **Linda Friedland** has once again created a tasty smorgasbord of field trips, both on weekends and weekdays, that are sure to be a hit. Thanks to all of the field trip leaders who donate their time and knowledge for these trips.

This past April, several of us joined the Earth Day Celebration at the Izaak Walton League located in Poolesville. Although we were eventually rained out, it was a nice way to introduce our club to the many people who stopped by our table. We hope to continue this activity again next April.

Finally, it is time to renew your membership; you will find the membership renewal form on the last page of this newsletter. For several years now, members have been able to receive the



Chat electronically. This year, the Maryland Ornithological Society is also urging its members to do the same with the *Maryland Yellowthroat*. Doing so will reduce printing and mailing costs tremendously and will also demonstrate how “green” we can be by saving paper.

Another bonus with choosing the electronic version of the *Maryland Yellowthroat* is that you will also get color photos highlighting the articles. These photos will not be in the hard copy. Please read the membership application carefully to be sure that you check the option you want. And thank you for printing your email address legibly.

I'm looking forward to a fabulous MBC year!

Good birding! ♪

—Anna Urciolo

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Fall Calendar

Share Your Enthusiasm

For birding, that is! Lead a bird walk for beginners at Audubon Naturalist Society some Saturday morning, and you may be reminded of how you got hooked on birding—someone showed you your first Indigo Bunting or Blackburnian Warbler, and a whole new world opened up. The walks are only an hour, and the groups usually small and enthusiastic. It's a good opportunity to share your knowledge with others, and the commitment is small. Let Pam Herrick, volunteer coordinator at ANS, know that you're interested, and when she sends out a list of coming Saturdays, you can sign up for as many or as few as convenient.

The ANS bird walks for beginners start at 8 a.m. in front of the Sanctuary Shop at Woodend and end at 9 a.m., just as the store opens. The walks are weekly March through June and again from September through November. They are monthly from December to February.

To find out more, email Pam Herrick at VOLUNTEER@audubonnaturalist.org.

Where the Birds Are: A New Birding Listserv

When our Maryland listserv, MD Osprey, shut down in early June, MBCer Jared Fisher and others were quick to fill the gap with a new group, Maryland and DC Birding (MDBirding). To visit MDBirding on the web, go to <https://groups.google.com/d/forum/mdbirding>. You can also visit the following link (<http://tinyurl.com/7gs2m7f>) to see instructions on some of the different ways you can sign up for the group.

To review the guidelines for how to post, visit <https://sites.google.com/site/mdbirdinghost/f/guidelines.pdf>.

Thanks to Jared for keeping the birding e-community going and to Norman Saunders for managing the original list, MDOsprey, for so many years. ♪

September 19 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. "Birding Tour of Cuba." In March 2012, *Sally Wechsler* went on a 10-day birding tour of Cuba, during which the group saw most of Cuba's endemic species plus other birds, including several of "our" wood warblers. She captured the actions and sounds of the experience with a handheld video camera. Come share some of the tropical island sights and actions in Sally's 50-minute video.

October 17, (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. "My 70 Years of Birding." It started by chance on a hike at Boy Scout Camp. That led to a Merit Badge and from then on *Don Messersmith* birded on his own in Toledo and on the shores of Lake Erie. In 1950 he went on a Youth Hostel trip to Europe and saw his first foreign birds. Don began leading hostel tours, which led to an invitation by the late Orville Crowder to lead his birding tours. After Orville's death, Don and his wife, Sherry, formed World Nature Tours, which gave him the opportunity to organize and lead tours to every continent and more than 100 countries. This talk will illustrate Don's story from the 1940s to the present day.

November 28 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., Midway Atoll. (*Note meeting date is on fourth Wednesday to avoid conflict with Thanksgiving.*) *Suzanne Dater* went to Midway Island for nine days in April 2011. Midway was the scene of the definitive Pacific battle of World War II and is now a UNESCO world heritage site, protecting the world's longest-flying species, the Laysan Albatross, as well as the Black-footed Albatross and other birds, the Laysan Monk Seal, and the Green Sea Turtle.

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:** Jane Farber and Jeanne Lacerte

President: Anna Urciolo: 301-251-9452
email: urcioloa@sidwell.edu

Membership: Helen Patton: 301-588-5418
email: 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, email: 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 linnet1@verizon.net or 301-983-2136 (before 9 p.m.).



September 5 (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 two to three miles on gravel and dirt trails, with some uphill. Beginners welcome! Reservations required. Limit: 8. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Claire Wolfe at 301-972-4278 or c_wolfe2003@yahoo.com.

September 9 (Sunday) 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. Contact the LEADER: Paul O'Brien at 301-424-6491.


September 12 (Wednesday) POPLAR ISLAND BOAT TRIP. The trip is free but there is a limit on the number of seats. Reservations are ESSENTIAL and are on a first-come first-served basis. Limit: 18. Meet at 8:45 a.m. We will be on the island for about four hours; the boat will return at 1 p.m. Restrooms on the island. Suggest bringing lunch/drinks, snacks. Birds we may see include shorebirds, terns, falcons, and other raptors. Less common birds may include Hudsonian Godwit, Baird's Sandpiper, and Wilson's Phalarope. For reservations, directions, and questions, contact the LEADER: Mike Bowen at 301-530-5764 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com.

September 13 (Thursday) 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, half a mile below the Nature Center). Reservations required. For reservations and directions, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack at 202-338-7859.

September 15 (Saturday) SNICKERS GAP, VA. Two-thirds day. Joint trip with AUDUBON NATURALIST SOCIETY. Migrant songbird watching at 8 a.m. along nearby Appalachian Trail. Migrant raptors starting about 9:30 a.m. from commuter parking lot near Bluemont, VA. Meet 8 a.m. at commuter parking lot at VA 7 and VA 601 (9:30 a.m. for raptors). Make reservation with LEADERS: Joan Boudreau and Bob Abrams at 703-734-1238. Bring tripod, scope, chairs, pack lunch, and rain/wind gear. Call leaders for directions.


September 16 (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 a.m. at Picnic Area 18 (on Ridge Rd, half a 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 at 202-338-7859.

September 22 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, JUG BAY NATURAL AREA. Half day; joint trip with AUDUBON NATURALIST SOCIETY. Driftboat on Patuxent River followed by trail walk. Search for Sora, also migrant and resident songbirds and waterbirds. 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: Greg Kearns and John Bjerke. Make reservation (15-person limit) with John Bjerke at 240-401-1643.



September 23 (Sunday) PENNYFIELD TO VIOLETTE'S BIRD STALK. Joint trip with ANNE ARUNDEL BIRD CLUB. 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 C&O Canal towpath to Violette's Lock. This walk should net an interesting mix of late warblers, land bird migrants, and probably a few first-show winter visitors, as we scan the skies and river for raptors and waterbirds. Limit: 16. If you plan to attend, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson at kingfishers2@verizon.net or 301-530-6574.

October 6 (Saturday) LILYPONS WATER GARDENS. Half day. Join us for a joint trip with FREDERICK COUNTY BIRD CLUB to this southern Frederick County hotspot. Target species include American Bittern, Nelson's 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: Marcia Balestri at 301-473-5098.



October 7 (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 at 301-514-2894.

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Field Trips

 **October 14 (Sunday) THE 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. For more information or directions, contact the LEADER: Chuck Parker at 240-446-8423 or chparker@access.k12.wv.us.

October 16 (Tuesday) MONTGOMERY COUNTY SPARROW SEARCH. Meet 7 a.m. and bird until 10. Be prepared to walk in long, wet grass and in muddy areas. The meeting place will be determined by the leader at a later date. Likely sparrows: White-throated, Swamp, Song, maybe White-crowned. Possible more difficult species: Clay-colored and Nelson's Sparrows. Limit: 8. For information and reservations, call the LEADER: Dave Powell at 301-540-8776.

October 28 (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 CO-LEADERS: Mark England at 240-207-3132 (home) or 240-375-4500 (cell) and Ed Patten at 301-948-5648.

November 4 (Sunday) BLACKWATER NWR. Full day (to dusk). Early waterfowl and lingering migrants plus late afternoon marsh watch. Brown-headed Nuthatch possible. Bring lunch and drinks. Reservations required. Limit: 12. For meeting place, time, and reservations, contact the LEADER: Andy Martin at martinap2@verizon.net or 301-529-2066.

 **November 11 (Sunday) LBJs AT BLUE MASH NATURE TRAIL.** 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. Half day. For reservations, time, and directions, contact the LEADER: Lydia Schindler at 301-977-5252 or lydiaschindler@verizon.net.

November 18 (Sunday) LOIS GREEN PARK. Half day. Explore the varied habitats of this relatively new 204-acre Montgomery County park. Songbirds, raptors, and 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 at 301-948-5648.

November 25 (Sunday) OCCOQUAN BAY NWR, VA. Half day. Explore the diverse habitats in this one-square-mile refuge at the confluence of the Potomac and Occoquan Rivers in Woodbridge, VA. A variety of migratory ducks and boreal migrants should be present. Meet at the parking lot in the center of the refuge at 8 a.m. Reservations are necessary. Limit: 20. For reservations, directions, and more information, contact the LEADERS: Mike Bowen at 301-530-5764 or dhm-bowen@yahoo.com, or Gerry Hawkins at 571-277-8406 or maineusa@comcast.net.

December 2 (Sunday) LILYPONS/NEW DESIGN ROAD. Half day. Wintering field birds, targeting Fox and Tree Sparrows, possibly Virginia Rail and American Bittern. For reservations (required) and more info, contact the LEADER: Gail Mackiernan at 301-989-1828.

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.
- ✓ No pets, please!

- ✓ Plan to arrive a little in advance of the starting time, appropriately dressed for the weather.
- ✓ 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



Trip Reports

Blue Mash Nature Trail and Oaks Landfill, Laytonsville, Saturday, April 28. Leader: Mark England. Participants: 11 including leader. Weather: Sunny the first hour, then overcast; temperatures in the 40s. Species: 46. Though it was still a little early for most migrants, we had a nice mix of birds by the end of the morning. We had good looks at Lesser Yellowlegs at the big pond and Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers side by side at the small pond, which was a nice comparison. Also at the small pond, we added Killdeer for a fourth shorebird, a single Northern Rough-winged and Barn Swallows, and a pair of Wood Ducks, which did not fly off till we all had good looks. Sharp-eyed Don Simonson was tail-spotter for the group and first saw an Osprey and a young Bald Eagle. Common Yellowthroats were numerous, but other warblers were heard only, including Yellow Warbler and Ovenbird. Around 10:30, some of us continued over to the adjacent Oaks Landfill and drove to the top of the hill, where we immediately saw a juvenile Northern Harrier and a Red-tailed Hawk. After a few minutes, the harrier began to harry the hawk, which was interesting to see. We added Savannah Sparrow and a lone Swamp Sparrow as we exited the landfill.



Occoquan Bay NWR, Sunday, April 29. Leader: Gerry Hawkins. We walked extensively around the refuge. Highlights included many Yellow-breasted Chats, Prairie Warblers, Yellow Warblers, Prothonotary Warblers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Northern Parulas, and Common Yellowthroats, as well as several other Neotropical migrants, including Indigo Bunting, Eastern Kingbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Orchard Oriole, Gray Catbird, and Red-eyed Vireo. We also saw six swallow species, including a scoped view of a perched Cliff Swallow and Bank Swallows, flying directly above us along Charlie Road, and the many Purple Martins that occupy the martin houses near the base of the docks that extend into Occoquan Bay, close to the entrance to Marmusco Creek. We also heard an Eastern Meadowlark repeatedly sing along Charlie Road and a Yellow-throated Vireo repeatedly sing right above us along Deephole Point Road. Highlights on the water included a couple of Bonaparte's Gulls, over 50 Caspian Terns, a half dozen Forster's Terns, a dozen Lesser Scaup, and two rafts of American Coot. Raptors consisted mainly of the many Osprey that nest at this refuge, including two that were seen at quite close range eating recently caught fish, but we also saw four Bald Eagles and two adult Red-tailed Hawks

flying together. At the end of the walk we saw one male Rusty Blackbird foraging by the pond adjacent to the main parking lot, along with two of the four Greater Yellowlegs seen during the walk. We encountered 72 bird species during the morning (including a White-eyed Vireo heard by me at the gate entrance before the walk).



Little Bennett RP, Sunday, May 6. Leader: Gemma Radko. Joint trip with Talbot County Bird Club. Participants: 14. Eight intrepid members of the Talbot County Bird Club "crossed the bridge" to join us for a walk at the Hyattstown Mill Road area of the park. The day was cool and cloudy—not ideal conditions, but we still managed to tot up a list of 59 species. Eleven of these were warblers, highlighted by excellent looks at a singing Kentucky on territory. Also well-seen were Black-and-White and Black-throated Blue. A beautifully singing Veery was also a highlight for many people. After our walk, we headed to Helen Patton's home, where a delicious brunch awaited the tired and hungry birders. Thanks for hosting, Helen! It was great fun birding with the Talbot folks; perhaps we will schedule a trip to visit them on their home turf soon.



Rock Creek Park Tour, Tuesday, May 8. Leader: Wallace Kornack. Participants: 8 (some from California and Arkansas). We visited all the standard birding sites at the Park. The group had an opportunity to view most of the 13 warblers seen by others. Highlights included the Prairie and very close views of a beautifully marked Canada. We just missed seeing a singing Tennessee at the Equitation Field. Other notable birds included the Yellow-throated Vireo, numerous Scarlet Tanagers, Baltimore Oriole, Great Crested Flycatcher, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Swainson's Thrush, Wood Thrush, and Red-tailed Hawk. Overall, 55 species were reported.



Birding by Ear along the C&O Canal, Friday, May 11. Co-leaders: Ann Lucy and Cyndie Loeper. Species: 55, with 10 warblers. Weather: "April in May" with many clothing layers required for comfort, but sunny with no

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Trip Reports

rain and no wind. Participants: 10 (eager and practiced in earbirding). An auspicious beginning with a Blackburnian heard by Ann, sitting (the bird, not Ann) at the top of a tree as we exited the parking lot. The trip also availed many versions of the Northern Parula and Yellow-throated Warbler vocalizations—good bird songs to study since they are easily confused with other species. We carefully studied Black-throated Blue and Louisiana Waterthrush for the same reasons. Both Orioles presented their contrasting songs. Vireos—White-eyed, Red-eyed, and Warbling—were evident. Solitary Sandpipers but no Spotteds. A good day was had by all.



Washington County in Search of Breeders and Late Migrants, Wednesday, May 23. Leader: Jim Green. Jim and Dave Powell arrived at Blair Valley Lake at about 5:30 a.m. and did some early scouting of the area. They were joined by Mike Powell at 7 a.m. The perimeter of the lake and adjacent areas were very quiet, and they moved on to explore various parts of Indian Springs WMA, making numerous stops and walking short distances primarily from the road but also exploring some field and forest edges as well. Breeding warblers seen or heard included Blue-winged, Hooded, Kentucky, Worm-eating Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat. We tallied 17 species of warblers with only three of them being migrants. We saw a Black-throated Green on Hanging Rock Rd, a Magnolia Warbler on Kuhns (some maps have it as “Coons”) Ridge Road, and had great looks at a singing Northern Waterthrush at Camp Harding Park. We also had our only Broad-winged Hawk and a single adult Red-headed Woodpecker in this same park.

We then “crawled” our way across Broadfording Road, heading east from Clear Spring to Hagerstown. We scanned farm fields in hopes of finding a Bobolink but had no luck although along the way we heard numerous Horned Larks, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Eastern Meadowlarks. West of the intersection of Spickler Road we found a very cooperative Vesper Sparrow and then, beyond that, we first heard two and then saw four different Dickcissels, all in the same field (south side of Broadfording). This is the first time I have had Dickcissels on this road. Previously I’ve only seen them at Antietam Battlefield and then only one at a time.

About half a mile east of Spickler Rd, while setting up a scope to look at our fifth Dickcissel, we clearly heard the unmistakable flight song of an Upland Sandpiper on the north side of the road. Within 30 seconds, we heard it a second time. Despite walking back down the road, we did not hear it again and had no luck in spotting the Uppie.

After we hit Hagerstown, we spent the rest of our day checking out potential shorebird spots. Despite the amount of rain that had fallen in the last 24 hours in Washington County, most locations either had received too much rain or not enough to attract shorebirds overnight. Behind the Hagerstown Airport, the pond was quite full of water with no edges. We did have a single Greater Yellowlegs at the end of the road where the Loggerhead Shrike was hanging out last year. We had our only Willow Flycatcher of the day in this same area.

We ended up with 90 species, and with the skies opening up with hard rain at about 4 p.m., we called it a day.



Hot Spots for Red Knots (Joint Trip with Howard County), Saturday, May 26 (Memorial Day Weekend). Co-leaders: Bill Stewart, Kurt Schwarz, and Cyndie Loeper. Participants: 14. Weather: not as unpleasant as predicted due to breezes at most stops. Some brief moments of bug annoyances. Species: 82, with 12 species of shorebirds. The highlight was a Sabine’s Gull, which was very cooperative. Beautiful in flight with those distinctive wing patterns and then it landed on a beach visible to the most numbers of birders on the Dupont Center deck. We had delightful views of the distinctive field marks as it was cruising the beach. Great coincidence that the “bird to be chased” was at the Mispillion location the trip was built around.

Shorebirds: It is spring migration so easier identifications but fewer species. This year we had to search for Red Knots. Even at Mispillion they were sparse; we only found eight! The thinking is that they are present but more dispersed than in previous years. We had both night-herons with good studies of the juvenile differences, a very unusual Tundra Swan at BBH, and good studies of terns at Fowler’s Beach, especially Forster’s compared with Common. Many Skimmers loafing and skimming. Also fun views of obliging Clapper Rails.



An Appreciation: John Grant Malcolm

(April 15, 1941–July 2, 2012)

John Malcolm was born and brought up in Missoula, Montana. As a native of Big Sky Country, his first impressions of the East were not promising, and it seemed at that time unlikely to be his career destination. He spent eight years in the U.S. Army, serving in California and Texas, and ending his service career at Fort Myer, Virginia, having also enjoyed a happy portion of his service in Italy, where he fell in love with the city of Verona. Rather than go back West, he stayed in the DC area where he earned a B.A. with honors (1970) and an M.B.A. (1971) from the University of Maryland. There followed a fellowship at the U.S. Defense Department and a long career as a management and systems analyst in federal service—at the Food and Drug Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services—until his retirement in 1999. John also taught courses on marketing and advertising at the University of Maryland (University College) for 20 years, starting in 1975, and he enjoyed teaching.

John's work colleagues remember him as hardworking, absolutely reliable, innovative, unflappable, unswervingly ethical, and possessed of a delightful sense of humor—qualities that those of us in the local birding community later came to recognize too, as he became involved in birding and started a remarkable record of service to the Maryland Ornithological Society.

As his interest in and knowledge of birds grew, John started taking classes taught by Don Messersmith in the late 1970s, where he met others who would become lifelong friends, like Don himself, Daphne Gemmill, and Bill Murphy, who was Don's teaching assistant. They formed the nucleus of a tight-knit little birding group that birded all over the mid-Atlantic and beyond, traveling in John's VW bus. At that time, John met beginning birder Joy Aso, who was later to become his wife. (John had been married and divorced and had a son, Lynn, and a daughter, Linda.) To this day, members of the group recall their trips with a tremendous amount of pleasure.

John's work with and for the Maryland Ornithological Society started in 1985, when he became a state director from the Montgomery County Chapter (as the Montgomery Bird Club was then called). In 1989, he became president of MOS and served in this capacity until



Photo by Bill Murphy

1992. Other MOS officers at the time describe him as easy to work with, and they noted the same sterling personal qualities as did his colleagues in the federal government. Then, as past-president of MOS, rather than sit back and rest on his laurels, John once again became a state director from Montgomery and concomitantly started (and in the case of the pin program, continued) the work that will be most familiar to those who have joined MOS in recent years—the awards program and the conference pin program. And for many years, his house was the storage place for a myriad of MOS products, such as coffee mugs and piles of “Yellow Books,” and John was the official MOS source for all such things.

As MOS president he had become persuaded that the Society needed to honor its outstanding workers and contributors (volunteers all), and he spent the succeeding years not only convincing the chapter presidents that they should recognize their best contributing members but personally making the award plaques or certificates, often writing or suggesting the wording. This program drew directly on John's experience with printing and computers, which he had gained in his work for the federal government. Surely no one in MOS has ever possessed such a deep knowledge of print fonts and paper properties or such a wicked sense of humor for the wording of an award plaque! One of my prized possessions is an “Attaboy” certificate, designed by John and presented after I had served as the local coordinator of an MOS conference.

For several years, he and Joy served on the board of directors of the World Nature Association where his management expertise was very helpful to his mentor, Don Messersmith. In recent years, he and Don also worked together on the recognition of MOS 50-year members. John's love of puns and odd occurrences he found on the Internet, which he shared with others, were always much

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Birds of Note (April to early July 2012)

Some great county bird sightings came from the Potomac River in the vicinity of Violette's and Riley's Locks during April and May. Those of us who are Montgomery listers should be thankful for the historical twist of fate that gave Maryland ownership of the Potomac River all the way to the Virginia shoreline. In 1632, Charles I of England carved some land from Virginia and granted a charter to Cecil Calvert, Baron of Baltimore, creating a new colony that would eventually become the state of Maryland. The charter further declared that Maryland included the "River of Pattowmack ... unto the further Bank of the said River." Legal wrangling between Maryland and Virginia since that time has failed to alter the states' borders.

Dave Czaplak found a single **Franklin's Gull** mixed in among hundreds of Bonaparte's Gulls at Violette's Lock on 4/9. The rare bird parade continued at Violette's Lock on 4/15 producing a **Little Gull**. An **Arctic Tern** (as well as two **Common Terns**) and 12 **Short-billed Dowitchers** were seen there on 5/21 (all found by Dave Czaplak). Jim Moore, arriving at Violette's Lock on 5/22, found the terns and dowitchers gone but was pleasantly surprised to find a **Red-necked Phalarope** spin-feeding on the river. John Hubbell arrived at Riley's Lock later in the day to find a total of three Red-necked Phalaropes on the river. On 6/1, Dave Czaplak noted a single **Laughing Gull** passing up river adjacent to Violette's Lock.

A **Western Tanager** was found by Dave Czaplak and Mary Ann Todd near Picnic Pavilion C at Black Hill RP on the morning of 5/12. The bird was relocated later in the day in the same area by Kathie Lambert. There was an interesting influx of **Summer Tanagers** into our area this spring. The first report of a Summer Tanager came from the Sligo Creek area by Pattie dePorter on 5/3. Subsequent reports of Summer Tanagers came in mid-May from Blockhouse Point CP, the C&O Canal near Pennyfield and Violette's Locks, and along River Road in the vicinity of the far west portion of McKee-Beshers WMA, where Clive Harris reported finding both a male and a female Summer Tanager. These birds turned out to be chaseable, with many birders adding this species to their Mont. County bird lists for the first time.

A dry spell in early May created some good shorebird conditions at the shallow pond within the Germantown Soccerplex. On May 4, a dowitcher species (initially misidentified as Short-billed) was found among the more common migrant shorebirds (Spotted, Least, and Solitary



Sandpipers, and Lesser Yellowlegs) that pass through our county each year. Mary Ann Todd and Dave Czaplak stopped by the soccerplex mid-afternoon, took some photos, and correctly identified the bird as a **Long-billed Dowitcher**. This is the first Long-billed Dowitcher reported in Montgomery since 1995.

Jim Stasz found a **Virginia Rail** at Hughes Hollow on 4/10. Woody and Rae Dubois reported a **Common Gallinule** there on 4/25. Dave Czaplak noted a single **Snowy Egret** at Hughes Hollow on 5/18.

On 5/16, Jared Fisher reported a single male **Dickcissel** near 20700 Westerly Road in the same area that three were found in 2011. **Vesper Sparrows** were back on territory and singing in the same vicinity as well. Dave Czaplak found a Vesper Sparrow at Hughes Hollow on 4/13.

Some nice regular but often "hard to find" migrants passing through the county over the past few months include a **Cerulean Warbler** and **Mourning Warbler** found by Dave Czaplak at Black Hill RP on 4/28 and 5/18, respectively; two **Wilson's Warblers** found by Daniel Romney at Pennyfield Lock on 5/2 and by Susan Hunt and Bonnie Coe at Riley's Lock on the same day; two **Gray-cheeked Thrush** reported by Diane Ford at Rock Creek Park on 5/3; and a single **Least Flycatcher** at Hughes Hollow, observed by Mike Bowen on 5/25.

The current cumulative Montgomery bird species total so far in 2012 stands at 220, according to Cornell University's eBird Project (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird>), which is 14 birds behind last year's total from this same time frame. By the time you read this, return migration should be underway, bringing another chance for rarities!

Good birding! †

— Andy Martin



John Malcolm, *continued from page 7*

anticipated and appreciated by everyone lucky enough to be on the distribution list.

Before John became MOS president he had started a program where artists competed to have their design reproduced on the small pins that are distributed to attendees at the annual MOS Conference; the same design is used on conference T-shirts. As one of the judges asked by John to help rate the submitted designs, I was able to see at close range how admirably fair and even-handed he was. Not once in the 10 years I acted as a judge did John reveal whose artwork we were assessing or even who my fellow judges were. Not once did he suggest that I should consider any one design as superior or inferior. A judging session with John over morning coffee was for me the highlight of many a cold January day.

John's sense of humor could come to the fore under almost any conditions. In 2008, at a memorial occasion at Woodend to honor the late Paul DuMont, a series of Paul's birding friends delivered quiet remarks. When it was John's turn, he broke the somber mood and brought the house down with a hilarious tale of a pelagic trip at which

everyone, including Paul, succumbed to seasickness. It was John at his best, and Paul would have loved it.

John Malcolm was a birder, and a good one, but he was much more besides. He loved traveling and collecting (tea bags represent one unconventional item!), cuisine, and companionship. In recent years, poor health caused him to slow down, but he always exuded cheerfulness and never quit volunteering.

There could be no finer epitaph for John than the one he penned himself before a June 2012 brain operation he feared he might not survive: "Tell everyone that I've had a great life, and I appreciate each and every one of them. If you receive this message, know that I loved you and was glad that you were part of my life. To remember me, please go do something nice for someone less fortunate than you."

—*Michael Bowen*



*Donations in John's memory
may be made to:*

The Maryland Ornithological Society,
MOS/John Malcolm Memorial
4141 Quail Way
Havre de Grace, MD 21078

Meet Your New Vice President: Ed Patten

Unlike Anna I was *not* born in a log cabin. I was born and spent a good portion of my life in Northwestern New Jersey. I started working in Maryland almost nine years ago, but the family officially moved to Gaithersburg eight years ago. I work in the Office of Compliance at the Center for Biologics of the Food and Drug Administration. For those who want to know more, the Center for Biologics is focused on vaccines, blood, and all the current stem cell therapies.

I have been married for 35 years to my wife Chris, a fact I am proud of. My daughter Kelly recently obtained her master's degree in Education from Johns Hopkins and is teaching elementary school in Montgomery County. She lives in DC.

During Kelly's semester abroad in Kenya, I was able to get in some birding in both Kenya and Tanzania.

My initial interest in birding started when I was young, and my parents had some nice wooded property. At an early age, I used to spend hours watching Pileated

Woodpeckers take huge chunks out of trees. The two pieces that put me over the edge were taking an ornithology course in college and, in my first job out of school, working with a birding fanatic who is now a longtime friend.

I developed my birding skills with some really good people in New Jersey. While in New Jersey, I was compiler of the NW Hunterdon Christmas count for about 10 years and was a regional editor for *Records of New Jersey Birds* for about six years. My atlasing experiences include working on the Breeding Bird atlases for Maryland, New Jersey, and upstate New York.

I enjoy traveling for birding and have been to several other states, to Europe and Kenya, and last year to the Cayman Islands. Most recently I have been trying to learn photography, which opens up a whole new aspect of birding. †

—*Ed Patten*

Birding Vignette: Wales



In 2004, Mike Bowen led an ANS trip to Wales and the Norfolk Coast with local assistance from Neil Donaghy of Celtic Bird Tours. It was a lovely trip with many bird sightings and some really nice accommodations. On the last day, we were told that there was a place where we could see Golden Orioles, one of Britain's rarest breeding birds, and it was on the way to the airport. Of course, we all wanted to give this a try, so we disembarked at the site called Lakenheath Fen. We walked up on a ridge, and the orioles were some distance away—a scope was needed to get an identifiable look. They were also cavorting in poplars, which were in full leaf, so they could only be seen when they moved to an open spot in the trees. This meant that there was some necessary jockeying for position among our group when one of the birds came into the open. It was also true that we were not the only users of the ridge, as it was clearly a place that accommodated cows and the presence of cows means the presence of cow pies.

When the cry went up that an oriole was in view, some participants paid more attention to getting in line for a scope view than watching where their feet were going—with the inevitable result that there was a transfer of cow manure. It got on shoes and then long pants, and for the most part the victims were totally oblivious to what was happening. Finally, someone noticed—to the dismay of the affected parties. The good thing was that we were on our way to the airport, so the luggage was in the vehicle and readily accessible.

A change of some clothes was completed, albeit with some teasing, and we continued to Heathrow only a little worse for wear and with a rare bird added to our list! †

—Helen Patton

Return to the Unfamiliar: British Bird Songs Challenge an Expat!

I was born in the United Kingdom at a time when we still called the country “Great Britain.” It was just a few months before the Nazis invaded Poland and precipitated Britain's entrance into World War II. Twenty-three years later, in 1963, I emigrated to the United States, which was heavily involved (many said bogged down) in the Vietnam War. Strangely, not even once in the years of my youth, through primary and secondary schools and six years at a British university, did I display the slightest interest in birds. Birding was a bug I simply didn't catch until a chance visit to the Blue Ridge of Virginia in late April 1966, where spring migration was in full swing, and friendly local birders loaned me optics and helped with identification of a raft of gorgeous wood warblers and flycatchers. I had never realized that these beautiful creatures even existed. The bug was an extremely virulent strain, and the infection, I'm happy to say, has never left my system.

When I first went back to Wales on vacation—which I have done at least 30 times over the years—I didn't know the birds. I did recognize a few really common species, like (Eurasian) Blackbird and (European) Robin, but I knew nothing about other birds that might be around, and I certainly didn't know any songs. So I had to learn everything from scratch. Each time I went back “home,” I had

to relearn things about the birds that I had completely forgotten since the previous visit, which might have been as much as three or four years before. Gradually, though, I became as confident about identifying British birds as North American birds. Consistently the most difficult aspect, I discovered, was recognizing songs and calls.

So it was once again when I went back to Britain in April/May 2012. My sister lives in North London, near a large park and small reservoir, and I regularly bird these places when staying with her. The very day my plane landed at Heathrow Airport I was out in Alexandra Palace Park, catching up with early spring migration and reacquainting myself with the loud, rich song of the Blackcap, the down-the-scale ditty of the Willow Warbler, and the repeat-every-phrase fluting of the Song Thrush. The nesting Great Crested Grebes over at the reservoir were silent, but it was great to see them again anyway.

Next day I paid a visit to a wonderful birding place, close to Hammersmith Bridge in West London, called the London Wetlands Centre. There's a collection of penned waterfowl there but also wooded areas and scrapes designed to attract wild ducks, geese, and waders (shorebirds). I had no trouble with the songs and calls of Great Tits, (Winter)

continued on page 11



British Bird Songs, *continued*

Wrens, Chiffchaffs (they actually sing “Zilp-Zalp”), Chaffinches, and many other songbirds, but one song—loud and insistent—had me baffled. The bird giving this song had a remarkable ability to move from one place to another without being seen. By the time I had heard six different singers without a glimpse of any of them, I was thoroughly frustrated. Must be a common local bird, but what on earth was it? Finally—and this isn’t easy for a supposedly “seasoned” birder like me to do—I stopped a bloke carrying a telescope and asked for help. “Well, it’s Cetti’s Warbler, innit?” he said. Of course! Cetti’s Warbler is a species that had never once been recorded in the U.K. at the time of my emigration, but which since about 1980 has started establishing itself as a regular and even common resident, probably aided by global warming. I was to record Cetti’s at virtually every place I birded in England and Wales for the succeeding month. I learned the song very quickly and will never forget it. I even saw the bird once!

My sister is a world traveler but not, so far, a birder. She is, however, what the Brits call “a jolly good sport.” She indulges my constant need to go birding while I, for my part, respect her interest in visiting historic houses, castles, and monuments, of which the U.K. has at least a zillion. Consequently she made no objection to my suggestion that we both travel to the County of Devon in England’s south-



Cirl Bunting spotted by Mike Bowen in Devon, England

west corner, where I was anxious to bird near Dartmouth. Fortunately, Agatha Christie’s old summer home and a delightful mansion built by the D’Oyly Carte family (impresarios who made their pile from their business arrangements with Gilbert and Sullivan) are National Trust properties and located right at hand. Both of us are Life Members of The National Trust.

I particularly wanted to see one species that has eluded me over the years

and which is now restricted as an uncommon and very local breeder to the coastal heaths of South Devon, having been extirpated from all other parts of Southern Britain. On a chilly, misty morning, we arrived at the Devon coastal path near Prawle Point and started walking. Nice looks at Stonechat, Greater Whitethroats singing, Eurasian Oystercatchers and Shags on the rocks, but no odd bird song. Then, on the return to the car park, we almost sensed it—a strange, unfamiliar, rattling song that I had heard before only on a CD of European bird sounds. We rounded a part of the cliff edge, and there it was in full view—a singing male CIRL BUNTING, so intent on projecting his voice that for 10 full minutes he didn’t move from the same spot. Lots of photos taken. Wow. My first new U.K. species in eight years!

Unfamiliar can be good—very good. †

—Michael Bowen

Feeding Frenzy at the Zoo

There’s a daily feeding frenzy at the National Zoo, but the participants are not sharks or lions and tigers or even any of the captive residents of the Zoo. They are wild Black-Crowned Night-Herons (BCNHs). This species has been nesting at the site of the Washington National Zoo since before it was established in 1889.

In early March, a few herons show up at the Zoo, but these are just “scouts,” checking out the breeding grounds. Then they leave, and about two weeks later, all the birds come—an estimated 100 breeding pairs. They nest in a rookery outside the Zoo’s Bird House. Chicks are born in early April.

There are seven species of night-herons worldwide, but the BCNH is the only one that is threatened due to habitat loss and that primarily in the mid-Atlantic portion of its range. Zookeepers report that they are often alerted by

visitors that there is an escaped bird, but this is almost invariably one of the wild Black-crowned Night-Herons.

The birds became adept at stealing food from the captive Zoo birds living in the outside enclosures, so the Zoo decided to start feeding the herons. The menu is always the same—fish and mice—and this seems to be fine with the birds. This year the feedings are open to the public. They take place daily at 2 p.m. behind the Bird House. To see a video of the feeding frenzy, go to the Zoo’s website at <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/>. The link is under “Zoo News.” And if you want to observe the action in person, you’d better hurry to the Zoo. The herons start leaving in mid-August and are mostly gone by September. †

Adapted from “See a black-crowned night heron feeding frenzy” on the Friends of the National Zoo website at <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/>.





MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL



I/we wish to join the Montgomery Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society, for the year beginning September 2011 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)

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

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Check if you **DO NOT** want your email address listed on the members-only section of our website.

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Check if you would like to read *The Chat* on the Internet instead of receiving it by mail. You will receive an email message when *The Chat* is posted on the club website.

Check if you would like to receive *The Maryland Yellowthroat* on the Internet instead of receiving it by mail.

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

