

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

May 2013

Volume 44, No. 2

President's Chat

It's May, migration is well underway, and we also have some "migrating" folks to thank for their service to our bird club. **John Combs** will be leaving his position as State Director, having served for two years. John always had a thoughtful comment to offer during our Council meetings and worked hard to publicize and help with the removal of non-native plants at Blue Mash.

Susan Hunt has finished her two-year term as Chapter Director and also added a lot to our meetings. Thankfully she will continue to be the *Chat* editor.

I am grateful for all of the work done by our continuing Council members: **Steve Pretl**, past president; **Ed Patten**, Vice-President; **Rae Dubois**, secretary; **Sally Wechsler**, treasurer; State Directors: **Chris Barnard** and **Andy Martin**; Chapter Directors: **Woody Dubois**, **Cecily Nabors**, and **Bill Adams**.

Where would we be without our Field Trip Coordinator, **Linda Friedland**, who tirelessly sought out field trip leaders and also produced a wonderful variety of places for these trips.

Thanks to all of our members who have volunteered to lead these field trips. You shared your wealth of knowledge and love of birding with patience and a big dollop of good humor.

Thanks to all of you who brought tasty refreshments for our meetings and who helped set up and take down chairs.

I'm delighted to announce that our Montgomery chapter had three applicants receive MOS

scholarships to the Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine for this summer. Jennifer Miller and Freda McMillan both work at Black Hill Regional Park, and Emily Wilberg hopes that this experience will help her achieve her wish to become a park ranger.

On Saturday, April 20, our club participated in the Earth Day festivities at the Izaak Walton League of America, located at 20601 Izaak Walton Way in Poolesville, MD. We had a table with a poster about MBC, common bird posters, field guides, word-find sheets for kids. Thanks to Katherine Thorington and Janet Millenson, who joined me for the event.

Now let's pull out our CDs, tapes, or even LPs (yes, I have an old Peterson recording) of bird calls to prepare for all of those warblers!

Good birding! ♪

—Anna Urciolo

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Spring Calendar

Annual Social

Over 70 people attended the MBC Annual Social in March, enjoying the dinner catered by Smokey Glen Farms with arrangements made by Jim Green. Andy Martin procured the wine and helped to keep it flowing. Guest of Honor Don Messersmith's talk on "Why We Bird" presented a highly personal and often hilarious take on the birding life. (See our website for Don's remarks.) John Hubbell did a great job of putting together and projecting the bird photos of a number of MBC members. Thanks to Gemma Radko for the beautiful birdy nametags, and to all who helped set up and clean up, brought appetizers, or just showed up to share in the event. ♪

Prothonotary Homes

Thanks to **Eric Skrzypczak** for replacing the Prothonotary Warbler nesting boxes at Riley's Lock and Hughes Hollow, just in time for the new arrivals! ♪

Remembering Mieke Mehlman

Our club lost a dedicated member when Mieke Mehlman died on January 30 at Asbury Methodist Village, where she had lived for the last 15 years of her life.

To friends and family she was always Mieke. Few knew her as Catharina Maria, the name that was given her in Rotterdam, Holland, where she was born in 1923. As a young woman she came to the United States to work in the Dutch embassy, and later she became an American citizen. She took her citizenship seriously, joining the League of Women Voters, studying critical issues, and participating in civic activities.

(continued on page 4)

May 15 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., Maryland's Salt Marshes and Birds. *David Curson.* David will provide an overview of Maryland's salt marshes and the birds that live there.

May 11 (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.

May 19 (Sunday), 9 to 11 a.m., Removing Invasive Plants at Blue Mash. The diverse habitats surrounding the closed Oaks Landfill attract birds and other wildlife, but bird diversity has dropped off in recent years due to invasive non-native plants. Come help remove invasive plants and return the area to a birding hotspot. Bring clippers, saws, and loppers if you have them, and wear long sleeves, long pants, comfortable walking shoes or boots, and a hat. For more information visit <http://maryland.sierraclub.org/montgomery/calendar.html>. Sponsored by the Department of Environmental Protection, the Montgomery County Sierra Club, and the Montgomery Bird Club.

Note: The Blue Mash Invasive Removal Program has been formally approved for Student Service Learning (SSL) by Montgomery County Public Schools. High school and middle school students can satisfy the state-required student volunteer service through this activity at Blue Mash. The opportunity description can be viewed in the Montgomery County Volunteer Center database at <http://montgomeryserves.org>; use keywords "Sierra Club."

The Club does not meet during the summer, but check out our website for news about bird sightings, and note the field trip schedule for the rest of May and the shorebird trip in August.

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 Anna Urciolo at 301-251-9452 or urcioloa@sidwell.edu.

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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 linnet1@verizon.net or 301-983-2136 (before 9 p.m.).

 **MAY 5 (Sunday) LITTLE BENNETT RP.** Half day. Near peak migration for warblers and vireos, including those breeding in this varied habitat. *Reservations required.* For time, directions, and reservations, call the LEADER: Gemma Radko at 301-514-2894.

MAY 7 (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. *Reservations required.* For more information, directions, and reservations, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack at 202-338-7859.

MAY 8 (Wednesday) WASHINGTON COUNTY: SEEKING BREEDERS AND MIGRANTS. Three-quarters to a full day. Explore some of Washington County's under-birded treasures. Expect some birding from the road, with some moderate hikes (nothing overly strenuous). Walking conditions could be wet in some areas. We will visit several parts of Indian Springs WMA, look for grassland birds in the farm country west of Hagerstown, and finish with stops at some historical shorebird habitats. Bring snacks, drinks, lunch, insect repellent, etc. *Reservations required.* Limit: 10. Carpooling strongly suggested. Meeting place will be north of Clear Spring at 7 a.m. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Jim Green at 301-742-0036 (cell) or jkgbirdman53@gmail.com.

 **MAY 10 (Friday) BIRDING BY EAR ALONG THE C&O CANAL.** The emphasis is on listening, so tune up your ears for this half-day canal walk. We'll be on the lookout for nesting and migrant landbirds. Meet at 7 a.m. at the end of Pennyfield Lock Rd. *Reservations required.* For more information and reservations, contact the LEADERS: Cyndie Loeper at cyndieloeper@comcast.net or 240-535-8584 or Ann Lucy at 301-229-8810.

MAY 11 (Saturday) IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE, B-CC CHAPTER. Half day. The Club's second official field trip to this large private property south of Poolesville. Woods, hedgerows, streams, fields, and ponds provide a wide range of bird habitats. Meet at 7 a.m. at the League's chapterhouse. *Reservations required,* but no attendee number limit. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Mike Bowen at 301-530-5764 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com. B-CC Chapter Treasurer and MBC member Jim Tate will co-lead.

MAY 19 (Sunday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. One-third day. 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 information, directions, and reservations, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack at 202-338-7859.

AUGUST 24 (Saturday) DELAWARE COASTAL AREAS (Joint trip with ANS). Full day at Bombay Hook, Little Creek, Logan Tract, and other sites. Shorebirds, marsh birds, and some songbirds. Bring pack lunch and water. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Bombay Hook Visitor Center parking lot. *Reservations required* (15-person limit). Contact the LEADER: John Bjerke at 240-401-1643. Cyndie Loeper will co-lead.



Welcome New Members!

Judith Bromley

Ebert Family

Jay Knox

Villiger Family

Mary Frances Bruja

Douglas Graham

Mittler Family

Tenley Wurglitz

William Bulmer

Kurt Hochstein

Myra Price



My Love of Birds

Editor's Note: Miles Jones is the winner of this year's MOS Youth Backpack. He is a third-grader at Sidwell Friends School. This is excerpted from his essay.

I have been fascinated by birds since I was 4 years old. I remember walking along the Canal with my Grandpa, and I was so excited when I saw my first Green Heron. Actually that was the only one I've ever seen. I would sit on my grandparents' back porch and listen for woodpeckers. Now I know there are Northern Flickers, Pileated, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers in their backyard.

By first grade I believed in myself as a great birder. That's the year my class went on a camping trip and I was the first one to spot a Scarlet Tanager. On another field trip I went to Roosevelt Island and there I saw my first Great Blue Heron. Also that year I began to join Mrs. Urciolo for bird chats at recess.

In second grade I started going to the Audubon Society to take walks on some Saturdays. I also went to Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge for the first time that year, during spring break. I saw 41 species on that trip, including a Purple Martin, a few Ospreys, a Wild Turkey, a Greater Yellowlegs, some Red-winged Blackbirds, and many more. I met some other birders that let me look in their telescope to see a Bald Eagle up close.



MBC President Anna Urciolo presents Miles Jones with his MOS Youth Backpack award.

What is my favorite bird? The truth is, I don't have one. Right now I'm interested in Great Blue Herons. I love their smoky blue color and how gracefully they fly. I also admire how they can stand so still for a long time. I can't do that. They also have a unique way of walking and they are fun to watch. I know exactly where to find them at Blackwater. This year I saw four Great Blue Herons standing in a row and one other one hanging out with a Cattle Egret! It was funny to see a heron with an egret. Are they friends or something?

My future is to be an Ornithologist or a Veterinarian. I want to travel the world looking for birds to study. I look forward to going to Alaska with my Grandpa when I am 13 years old.

My love of birds will stay with me forever. It's a big part of my life. Birding is a great adventure! ♪

—Miles Jones

Mieke Mehlman *(continued from page 2)*

She and her husband Ben, who died in 2004, enjoyed travel, especially when it afforded educational opportunities. She told me they sometimes attended as many as three Elderhostels in a year.

I knew Mieke as a friend and neighbor when they lived in Bethesda. She was the kind of neighbor who took soup to the sick and books to the housebound. But I knew her best as a birding companion. Her sons, David and Donald, became birders at an early age, and it was never clear to me whether they led her into birding or if she led them, but this continued to be a shared interest.

They became members of the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Montgomery Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society, now the Montgomery Bird Club. Mieke entered into club activities wholeheartedly, quick to sign up for Christmas Counts and May Counts. It was my

good luck to team up with her for the years of the Breeding Bird Atlas. We covered miles together in that pursuit, and I was challenged to maintain her brisk pace. Her keen hearing and sharp vision were considerable assets on the trail. But I found her a model of patience when it came to verifying established nests. I have a special memory of sitting quietly with her in a weedy lot, following the distraction maneuvers of a Grasshopper Sparrow until they finally led to its nest.

Mieke took a special delight in all phases of the natural world and did her part to enhance the beauty of her surroundings. In spring her yard was the first to have crocuses in bloom, and the walkway to her door was always lined with colorful flowers, signaling a welcome and reflecting Mieke's cheery personality. ♪

—Lola Oberman





Trip Reports

Swain's Lock to Hughes Hollow (Winter Waterfowl on the Potomac), Sunday, February 3. Leader: Andy Martin. Participants: 9. Species: 55. Waterfowl was our main focus, but pickings were slim in the Great Falls to Swain's Lock stretch of the river. We started the day at Swain's, walking downstream toward the Rockville water pumping station. A beautiful Pileated Woodpecker was our prime highlight as it fed at the base of the dead tree just 35 feet or so on the other side of the canal. We also got some great "8 to 9 feet away and from above" looks at several Golden-crowned Kinglets as they fed in the brush along the riverbank. We moved on to Riley's where we noted three Northern Shovelers on the river as well as two adult Bald Eagles perched in a tree across the river.

On the way to Hughes Hollow, we stopped at the Kunzang Palyul Choling Buddhist Temple feeders, but we saw mostly the regular feeder birds. Some folks did get FOS (first of the season) Brown-headed Cowbirds. This may be the only time of the year when you actually look forward to seeing a cowbird! At Hughes Hollow, things were quiet except for great looks at a couple of Hermit Thrushes.



Coastal Worcester County, Saturday, February 9. Co-leaders: Jim Brighton and Bill Hubick. The 14 brave participants were well aware of the potential for a chilly day, but the wind and cold proved to be relentless. The leaders adjusted the trip agenda considerably, including a rare move to a few prime locations in Delaware! We started the day on Assateague Island, where we hoped for continuing winter finches and perhaps a Northern Saw-whet Owl. While these hopes weren't realized, there were excellent looks at favorites like Red-breasted Nuthatches. With the Maryland Biodiversity Project on our minds, we highlighted a lot of Assateague's flora and fauna, including the Japanese Black Pines planted in the state park and the tiny Sika Deer foraging alongside ponies. Check out the website (www.marylandbiodiversity.com/) and our daily Maryland naturalist history posts on Facebook (www.facebook.com/MarylandBiodiversity). ("Like" the Facebook page to receive updates on the project.)

A quick tour of promising ponds and bayside water access provided a nice checklist of waterfowl, including a female Redhead that was missed by an all-day waterfowl workshop in the county! The Ocean City Inlet greeted us with painfully cold temperatures but made up for it with some

good birds. A roosting Great Cormorant was a favorite, and we also had great views of shorebirds including Purple Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings, and a couple of American Oystercatchers. Perhaps most memorable was a Red-throated Loon repeatedly vocalizing in front of us, a Maryland first for all present.

To implement our unusual plan to explore the wilds of Delaware, we started at Assawoman Wildlife Area, where a locked gate required a long hike to the waterfowl viewing area. Fortunately, the woods kept us out of the howling wind, and we were greeted by Pine Siskins as we stepped out of our cars and had great birds like Brown-headed and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, and Fox Sparrows. When we arrived at open water, we were greeted by a raft of hundreds of dabblers. As luck would have it, I found an adult Eurasian Wigeon almost immediately. Everyone was able to get satisfying views of this hoped-for rarity.

We almost forgot the cold at the Indian River Inlet, where the stunning waterfowl show in the late afternoon sun made for memorable scope views and excellent photo opportunities. (For Evelyn Ralston's photos from this trip, please see <http://smu.gs/ZZZ62I>; for Ashley Bradford's, see <http://tinyurl.com/bnlnykk>.) A close flock of Long-tailed Ducks provided as enjoyable a study of that species as any of us had ever had, and the flock was supplemented by a brilliant Common Eider and representatives from all three scoter species. Two Great Cormorants were perched on the tower. With a bit of daylight left, we headed to Silver Lake and added a few birds to our day's cumulative list. Highlights were a flock of over 900 Canvasbacks and close studies of a hybrid Mallard x American Black Duck.

We'd made the best of a challenging day, and we decided to top it all off with a Mexican feast. A pleasure as always spending time with our friends in MBC!



Oaks Landfill, Laytonsville, Sunday, February 10. Leader: Mark England. Weather: Cold! 19° when we started, gradually rising to mid-30s, but there was little wind—a very good thing! Species: About 30. We had a large group of 25 participants, well over the "limit" of 16, mainly because I got a lot of last-minute calls as the

continued next page



Trip Reports

weather forecast was pretty good for that day, and I didn't have the heart to turn anyone down. High school student (and terrific birder) Alex Wiebe and Wayne Gordon from Sykesville were a big help spotting birds and helping folks get on them. Probably due to the low temps, about all we saw the first hour were Song Sparrows by the dozens, but there were a couple of the resident Red-tailed Hawks about, and we spotted a kestrel leaving the trees along Riggs Road. As it warmed up, we started to see more birds, including two Northern Harriers and a good selection of sparrows with great looks at several American Tree Sparrows and Savannah Sparrows, as well as White-throats, White-crowned (one juvenile), and Field. It was easily the most American Tree Sparrows I had ever seen there.

Except for the harriers and a few more Red-tailed Hawks, we didn't see the usual range of raptors. The large pond was mostly frozen, so there were no waterfowl recorded this time, but everyone seemed to enjoy the morning.



Blue Mash, Wednesday, February 27. Leader: Stephanie Lovell. Three intrepid people joined me on what began as a wet morning due to a huge rainstorm the day before; it was fairly chilly with the temperature to start at 39°. By the time we finished two hours later, it had risen to 46°; the rain was threatening, but periodically the sun tried to get through, so not a bad day actually. First checking out the pumpkin patch, we found three male and one female Northern Cardinals eating pumpkin seeds. A Carolina Wren, one of many, sang its song, and one lone Towhee called twice as we walked up to the first pond.

On the pond were a pair of Bufflehead, Ring-necks, Mallard, and Gadwalls, and a Northern Harrier flew over our heads as we watched the ducks. By the entrance to the outbuildings at the end of the gravel road, we heard a couple of Killdeer complaining about something, and the first of several bluebirds were checking out the boxes. We saw several pairs on the walk.

On the second pond were some Canada Geese, another Gadwall pair, and one lone Ring-neck. It was a challenge to cross the various ditches, but we made it and continued around the long way and it was worth it: many, many Juncos; several Red-winged Blackbirds testing their

spring song, Song Sparrows and one Field Sparrow, lots of Mockingbirds, no Tree Swallows yet. A Downy and some Northern Flickers were the woodpeckers of the day. Twenty-two species for the day, and more soon!



Afternoon/Evening Walks, Western Montgomery, March

5. Leader: Jim Green. At Riley's Lock, participants were welcomed by 39 Tundra Swans sitting on the Potomac River as well as Horned Grebes. Highlights at Hughes Hollow were Ring-necked Ducks and Wood Ducks (FOY for most people). We finished on Sycamore Landing Rd. with nice displays of American Woodcocks. While standing in the field, we also had several flyover flocks of Tundra Swans including one flock of 150+.

March 7: A single Common Merganser drake was seen from the bridge at Riley's as well as six Pied-Billed Grebes and five Horned Grebes. We noticed (via scope) that several of the Great Blue Heron nests on the far side of the river opposite Violette's Lock already had activity with several birds flying into and sitting on the nests.

At Hughes Hollow we saw three drake American Wigeons and two Hooded Mergansers in the eastern impoundment. On the western side were 15 Ring-necked Ducks. Two Tree Swallows were flying about and calling. Ducks flying into the far western impoundment included Wood Ducks and several more Hooded Mergansers. On Sycamore Landing Road, we only saw/heard three American Woodcocks, but one bird flew into the field and landed about 40–50 feet in front of us. We all enjoyed the bird through our binoculars, watching him change directions as he was "peenting." This woodcock made at least six aerial flights and landed each time within 30–60 feet of us, allowing us to find him in the grass just about every time (some of the best views I've had in several years).

March 12: At Riley's, we had Pied-Billed (3) and Horned Grebes (5) as well as a drake Red-Breasted Merganser. An Eastern Phoebe entertained us with its song and chip notes, reminding us that spring was indeed just around the corner. Just north of the water intake on the Virginia side in a not-so-tall tree, we scoped three immature Bald Eagles and then an adult eagle flew past the perched ones.





Trip Reports

At Hughes, Red-winged Blackbirds and Tree Swallows were increasing. Waterfowl in the impoundments included American Wigeon (2), Ring-necked Ducks (15), and Hooded Mergansers (4). All of the ducks were also seen in flight, along with at least a dozen Wood Ducks. The Great Egret reported earlier made a brief appearance. We were also entertained by an Osprey that glided leisurely over the eastern impoundment. We heard a Barred Owl call once.

At Sycamore Landing, we both saw and heard American Woodcocks displaying in the fields. I estimated four different birds with numerous displays, including at least six displays by a bird that was taking off and landing very close to us (I nicknamed him “Old Faithful”).

March 19: The highlight at Riley’s was a single Bonaparte’s Gull seen on the water and occasionally flying just above the Violette’s Lock rapids. Other than an occasional flyby Wood Duck, we were entertained by a few Horned Grebes in various stages of breeding plumage. A singing Eastern Phoebe continued also.

At Hughes Hollow, the wind was picking up. We saw the usual Ring-necked Ducks, Hooded Mergs, American Wigeon, flyover Gadwall, and Wood Ducks. A single drake Green-winged Teal gave most of us brief looks. Some of the group had looks at Blue-winged Teal. As we were walking back to our cars, a Wilson’s Snipe was perched on a log in the impoundment just above the water’s edge. At Sycamore Landing, despite the windy conditions, we had an estimated three birds displaying, with one in close again. As we walked back to the cars, a silent Barred Owl flew low overhead to put its emphasis on a great evening of birding.

Having led these annual trips for a number of years, I feel that this year’s trips were by far the most successful as everybody on every trip saw at least one American Woodcock on the ground and also witnessed their aerial display multiple times.



Patuxent River Park—Jug Bay Natural Area, Saturday, March 9. Leader: John Bjerke. Participants: 8. Species: 38. A beautiful spring day for this joint trip with ANS. Although birding was a bit slow, we enjoyed the cleverly disguised Wilson’s Snipes on the mud flats and the Osprey that were establishing nests. There was plenty of

bird song and a shy Hermit Thrush. We stopped on the entrance road to observe a Bald Eagle on the nest. We had Rusty Blackbirds in two spots; the eBird report will help researchers plan next year’s blitz for this rapidly declining species. Waterfowl were noticeably missing, but the multiple instances of flyby Wood Ducks were most welcome.

Hughes Hollow and Vicinity, Saturday, April 13.

Co-leaders: Bob Schaefer (Frederick Bird Club) and Jim Nelson (MBC). Participants: 16. Species: 52. We enjoyed a productive morning on this joint field trip of the Montgomery and Frederick Bird Clubs, exploring the impoundments, woods, fields, and hedgerows at Hughes Hollow. The weather started out in the 40s and remained sunny, pleasant, and wind-free for most of the morning. Initially, a beautiful low fog hung over the large impoundment backlit by the sun low in the east.

Before the others arrived, co-leader Jim Nelson heard a distant Barred Owl, which stopped sounding off too soon for the group to enjoy. Highlights in the impoundments were the continuing male Redhead, a calling Pied-billed Grebe, Gadwall, Blue-winged Teal, several pairs of Wood Duck, a lingering male Ring-necked Duck, a distant white egret (probably a Great Egret), and several American Coot. Overhead, we were treated to four circling Broad-winged Hawks, three Osprey flying and perching in the trees (including one carrying nest material), Red-shouldered Hawk, and Northern Rough-winged and Barn Swallows flying around with the resident Tree Swallows. In the trees and bushes along the levees and throughout the area beyond the levees, we enjoyed lots of yellow Palm Warblers and “Myrtle” Yellow-rumped Warblers. We also saw many Swamp Sparrows and a male Rusty Blackbird. We puzzled over two very drab warblers thinking they might be Orange-crowned Warblers, but, after much consideration and study of field guides at home, Jim concluded that they were just pale Pine Warblers. Back in the fields and hedgerows to the south of the impoundments, sharp eyes finally found the sought-after Red-headed Woodpecker. In the same area, we encountered two singing White-eyed Vireos, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, a singing but never located Brown Thrasher, more Pine Warblers, a Field Sparrow, a Chipping Sparrow, and a skulking Eastern Towhee. A beautiful pair of Eastern Bluebirds posed for many pictures.

A Ghana Birding Saga

Don't know what possessed me to sign up for a three-week February birding tour to the central African nation of Ghana—I hate hot weather, hotels without a/c, functional ceiling fans, or running water; and previous visits to Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia had left me with heat prostration and lingering stomach disorders. Well, perhaps I do know—it was the prospect of adding 200 new species to my world life list and getting that list closer to 4,000 before I hang up my binoculars and settle for a rocking chair near the window feeders.

I arrived in Accra a day early, as did two others on the tour, so instead of sensibly resting up for the trek ahead, we engaged some local bird guides to take us around the Shai Hills Reserve and the big salt-water lagoon at Tema to get us acquainted with some of the local birds. We found 87 species that day, including two (Long-crested Eagle and Pied Avocet) that we never came across for the rest of the trip. We were also duly impressed by the heat and humidity and by a persistent gray haze in the air, a result of dust being blown down from the Sahara Desert by a northeasterly dry season wind called the “Harmattan.” This haze was to make identifying small birds quite tough over the following weeks, rendering them monochromatic or just silhouettes against the light gray sky.

Next morning we met our U.K.-based leader, Nik Borrow, and the rest of the tour participants: three English birders, a CPA from Surrey, a physician from Sheffield, and a corporate lawyer from the City of London. There was also a French couple, he an Inspector Clouseau type with a bald head and bristly mustache aiming for 6,000 on his life list, Madame a charming woman with very little English and who turned out to hate the heat and humidity even more than I did. Everyone else had already birded extensively in West Africa, having visited The Gambia, Gabon, Senegal, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast in addition to the “birdy” countries in East Africa. Nik is a veteran leader of tours to Africa and the co-author and plate artist for field guides to *The Birds of West Africa* and *The Birds of Ghana*, the latter serving as our bible and prayer book throughout the tour. (Of the 758 species represented in that guide, we eventually recorded well over 400.) We also met our in-country co-leader, James Nkator, and his assistants from the very competent Ashanti African Tours company. James' eyes and ears were truly remarkable, and he moved like a young gazelle, even after he twisted his knee in one of the tour's occasional “downer” moments.



Yellow-headed Picathartes
photo by Mike Bowen

Off we went in Ashanti's brand-new Nissan mini-bus—back to Shai Hills. This time there were lots of new birds, the most memorable of which were several Blue-bellied Rollers (“Rollers rolling,” called out Nik), and it was a thrill to see these colorful birds flying in wide arcs and even more of a thrill to see one perched and to photograph it. Vieillot's Barbets and Gray Hornbills also caught our attention, but we failed to locate a calling Chestnut Owlet, and I inexplicably missed the Oriole Warbler, which everyone else saw easily. (I did see two of this species later at Mole National Park.) Back to the Hotel Alexis (“Merry Christmas” still featuring prominently over the front entrance) for lunch and a brief rest before getting out into the field again from about 3:30 p.m. until dusk, which occurs just after 6 p.m. at this latitude, a bit north of the equator. I grew to be wary of these afternoon sessions, when the temperature had not dropped much from its daily high, and when I (and most everyone else except the leaders) became drenched in perspiration from head to foot within 10 minutes of setting out. It did get a bit cooler when the sun went down, and we usually stayed out for at least 30 minutes after dark to trawl for owls and nightjars.

The daily pattern was set for the remainder of the trip: up well before dawn, a quick breakfast (always omelets and sometimes baked beans as well), and in the field birding before 6:30 a.m. until 11 a.m. or so when the heat became intolerable and/or the birds were inactive, lunch back at the hotel, a brief siesta if the a/c was working. Then we were back in the field for the afternoon sweat, followed by some after-dark owling and return to the hotel for dinner, accompanied by one or more ice-cold beers (sheer heaven!) and daily updating of the checklist. Then bed, perchance to sleep. I found I could sleep pretty well *if* the room temperature dropped below 84 degrees, but often it didn't.

— Michael Bowen (*to be continued*)



Birds of Note (January 2013 to mid-March)

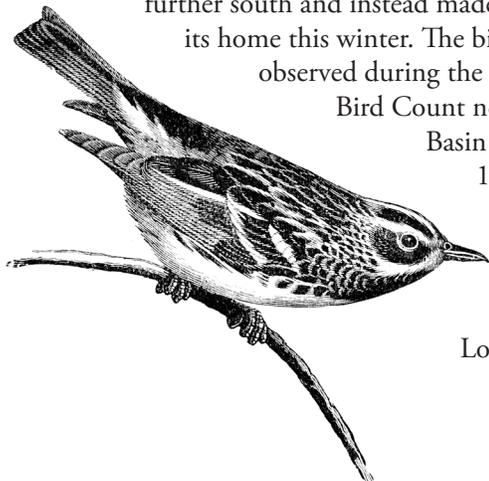
A surprise visitor to Clare Nemes' backyard in Silver Spring on 1/9 turned out to be a **Black-throated Gray Warbler**. The bird was subsequently seen a few more times by Clare and some other lucky birders through 1/22. Some other "out-of-place/out-of-season" passerines over the past few months include a **Black-and-White Warbler** found by Derek Richardson near Mile Post 39 during the C&O Canal Midwinter Survey on 1/26. Stephen Davies' Silver Spring yard was visited by an **Orange-crowned Warbler** on 2/15. Jim and Ann Nelson briefly glimpsed and heard a **House Wren** at Hughes Hollow on 2/25. Elda Banks found a **Brown Thrasher** in her Colesville yard on 2/17.

The winter finch invasion never quite materialized in Montgomery the way folks hoped it would when birds (crossbills, redpolls, Evening Grosbeaks) started to trickle down the East Coast during the fall. However, Dave Czaplak found a **White-winged Crossbill** feeding in the pines at Hoyles Mill Conservation Park on 1/12 and also two **Red Crossbills** feeding in the Norway Spruce patch at the corner of Elmer School and Club Hollow Roads near the NIH Animal Facility on 2/2.

Dave Czaplak noted a juvenile **Iceland Gull** flying downriver at Violette's Lock on 3/10.

Katherine Thorington observed a single **Peregrine Falcon** in flight over Cabin John RP on 1/9 and another one over the Old Angler's Inn area near MacArthur Blvd on 1/30. **Peregrines** were also reported from the downtown Bethesda and Silver Spring areas between January and March. Nitin Agarwal reported the first Montgomery **Osprey** of the year from Hughes Hollow on 3/12. **Short-eared Owls** were observed flying over the Oaks Landfill by John Pangborn on 1/9 and Elaine Hendricks on 1/23.

A **Great Egret** seems to have ignored the urge to head further south and instead made Montgomery its home this winter. The bird was initially observed during the Seneca Christmas Bird Count near the Turning Basin at Riley's Lock on 12/16 and was again observed near Violette's Lock on 1/4 and at Pennyfield Lock on 1/9 and



1/10. Lydia Schindler reported a very early **Great Egret** at Hughes Hollow on 3/10—possibly the same bird? Stephen Davies reported the return of a **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** to the Sligo Creek watershed on 3/11. A few days later, Mike Bowen observed a **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** in flight in the vicinity of the Wisconsin Ave/Cedar Lane area of Bethesda. Jim Green reported a flyover **Black-crowned Night-Heron** at Sycamore Landing Road on 1/6. Dave Czaplak found an **American Bittern** at Hughes Hollow on 12/30. Possibly the same bird was seen again in flight over Hughes Hollow by Linda Friedland and Evelyn Ralston on 1/6.

On February 6, Ed Stedman observed a single **Sandhill Crane** feeding in a large cornfield on the west side of River Road between Partnership Road and the first turn-in for Hunting Quarter Road. This bird was occasionally seen in the same location by other birders for a few weeks after. On 3/10, Lydia Schindler, while waiting for the crepuscular mating displays of American Woodcock, noted a couple of flyover **Sandhill Cranes** at Sycamore Landing Road.

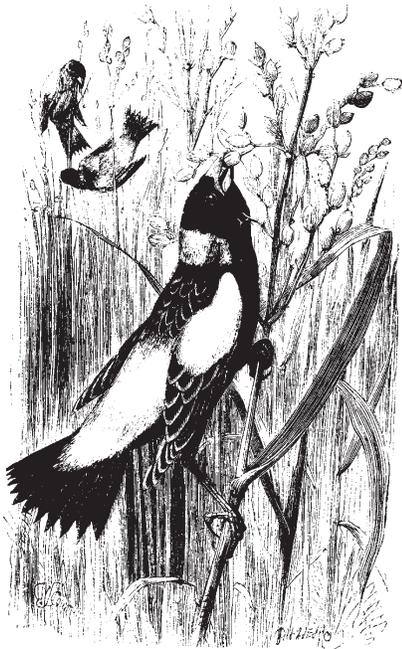
It hasn't been the best winter for waterfowl in the county, but a few good birds have shown up. Dave Czaplak observed a **White-winged Scoter** at Black Hill RP/Little Seneca Lake on 1/15 and a **Surf Scoter** on the Potomac near Violette's Lock on 1/31. Dave also had 3 **Snow Geese** on the river near Violette's Lock on 1/4. Two **Snow Geese** were found at Lake Churchill adjacent to Black Hill RP 1/4 to 1/6. Joe Hanfman observed a single **Cackling Goose** at Triadelphia Reservoir 1/4. Daniel Kraushaar reported nine **Cackling Geese** mixed in with 600 or so Canadas near the southern end of Lake Needwood on 1/26. Stephen Davies reported a **Richardson's-type Cackling Goose** at the Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds on Dennis Ave in Silver Spring on 1/29. Bob Cantilli reported a **Mute Swan** on the Potomac upstream of Great Falls during the C&O Canal Midwinter Survey on 1/26.

In "twitching" news, Jim Green accomplished a Montgomery 100-bird month in January—not an easy feat to achieve. The challenge came about from a friendly wager with Jim's good friend, Dave Young. It took Jim all the way to January 31 to reach the 100 species mark. Dave Czaplak's last-minute report of a **Surf Scoter** at Violette's Lock gave Jim the 100th bird he needed for the month. Good show, Jim! ♪

—Andy Martin



Candidates for Officers and Directors, 2013–2014



In accordance with Article V of the Montgomery Bird Club Constitution, at the April 17, 2013, Club meeting, the Nominating Committee announced the following candidates to serve as officers and directors for the Club. Each person nominated has agreed to run and to serve if elected.

President: Anna Urciolo
Vice-President: Ed Patten
Secretary: Rae Dubois
Treasurer: Sally Wechsler

Chapter Director: Woody Dubois
Chapter Director: Evelyn Ralston

State Director: Andy Martin
State Director: Chris Barnard
State Director: Jim Moore

There were no additional nominations from the floor, and nominations are now closed. The election will take place at the Club's May 15 meeting. The Officers and the State Directors serve one-year terms. The Chapter Directors serve two-year terms. Chapter Directors Cecily Nabors and Bill Adams, elected last year, have one year remaining in their terms.

—Mark England, Chair
Chris Wright, Jim Nelson

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