

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

February 2015

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President's Chat

Having just returned from a family (non-birding) vacation in Argentina, I am now back to the reality of the cold winter in Montgomery County. Quite the contrast from relaxing in a comfortable chair enjoying one of Mendoza's fine Malbecs while leisurely watching Southern Lapwings with 90°F temperatures!

Just a reminder that our inclement weather policy is that if Montgomery County public schools are closed for the day or if evening activities have been cancelled, our meeting will also be cancelled.

An additional reminder that we have many good field trips on the schedule. Check the calendar, and get out in the field. See what birds are in Montgomery County this season.

We are in need of some volunteers for the *Chat*. Susan Hunt is retiring as editor. The May issue will be her last. Gemma Radko would like to move on from her position as the designer for the *Chat*. She is willing to stay on until we have a replacement. Andy Martin is also looking for a replacement to do his "Birds of Note" column that appears in each issue. We cannot offer enough thanks for the fine work they have all done on the *Chat*.

As was mentioned at the December meeting, Carolyn Smith received the MOS Scholarship



to the Joy of Birding nature camp in Hog Island, Maine. Congratulations to Carolyn!

On the back of this *Chat* is the signup form for our Club Social on Friday, March 20, at the ANS Woodend mansion. This is a great chance for all of us to get together over delicious food, chat, and be amazed at the wonderful photos presented by our members. I encourage you to sign up early since space is limited. Please contact Clive Harris (clivegharris@yahoo.com) if you would like to help with the Social or can bring appetizers.

Good birding! ♪

—Ed Patten

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Winter/Spring Calendar

ANS Trip to Panama

Space is still available in the Audubon Naturalist Society's April 18-25 trip to Panama. The trip is based at the new Canopy Camp, run by the folks who have hosted many happy birders at their Canopy Tower. Montgomery County birder Rob Gibbs will lead with local guide Carlos Bethancourt in this rich rainforest environment. Check out www.anshome.org/travel to download trip itinerary and more. ♪

February 11 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. (Note: Meeting date is on the **second** Wednesday to avoid conflict with the church's observance of Ash Wednesday.) **"Quiz Night."** Back by popular demand. Come along and test your bird identification skills in a photo quiz of mid-Atlantic birds, presented by Clive Harris, MBC vice president. If you're interested in submitting photos of birds to be in the quiz, please contact Clive at clivegharris@yahoo.com.

March 20 (Friday), 6:30 p.m. Annual Montgomery Bird Club Social, Woodend, Chevy Chase. Guest of Honor: Jim Nelson. Program includes members' slide show. See back cover for sign-up form.

April 15 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. "Birds of Ecuador." Bob Mumford has made 16 trips to Ecuador to photograph birds. He will show us the best of his photos from this wonderful country with a spectacular variety of species.

May 20 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. TBA.

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 Ed Patten at 301-948-5648 or epatten1022@verizon.net.

Welcome New Members!

Bruce Beehler

Susan Culbertson and
Stephen Wright

Ann, Stan, and
Evangeline Durkee

David Epstein

Ryan Fick

Bridget Lewis

Stephen Lonker

Susan Pucie

Alison Skeel

Elizabeth Taylor



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Editor: Susan Hunt **Designer:** Gemma Radko

President: Ed Patten: 301-948-5648
epatten1022@verizon.net


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

Visit our homepage at www.montgomerybirdclub.org


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



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.).

FEBRUARY 8 (Sunday) OAKS LANDFILL, LAYTONSVILLE. Bundle up for a LATE AFTERNOON search for wintering sparrows and raptors, including possible Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls, at this now-closed landfill adjacent to the Blue Mash Nature Trail. Mostly open terrain with some ponds, which we will check if not frozen over. 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 3:30 p.m. on landfill entrance drive at 6001 Rt. 108, Laytonsville, Md. For reservations and more info, contact the LEADER: Mark England at 240-375-4500 (cell) or markengland@canamcontractors.com.

 **MARCH 10 (Tuesday), MARCH 12 (Thursday), MARCH 17 (Tuesday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON WALKS** until dusk. Joint trip 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 proceed to Hughes Hollow. Highlights here will include waterfowl flying into roost. We will try for displaying woodcock if they are in the vicinity. Bring scope and flashlight, and wear "muddy conditions" footwear. Reservations not required—all are welcome. For more info, call the LEADER: Jim Green at 301-742-0036 (cell).


MARCH 14 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, Jug Bay Natural Area, Prince George's Co. Half day. Joint trip with ANS. Waterfowl, Wilson's Snipe, winter and early spring songbirds, Ospreys displaying. Meet at 8 a.m. at parking lot by park hqtrs. Wear muddy conditions footwear. Limit: 15. Reservations required. Contact the LEADER: John Bjerke at 240-401-1643.

APRIL 12 (Sunday) HUGHES HOLLOW AND VICINITY. Half day. We will explore the wetlands of Hughes Hollow and Sycamore Landing. Species to be expected include Red-headed Woodpeckers, Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, and many other marsh dwellers. A chance for several warblers including Prothonotary. Meet at Hughes Hollow parking lot in the McKee-Beshers WMA at 7 a.m. Reservations not required. For more information, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson at 301-530-6574 or kingfishers2@verizon.net.

APRIL 25 (Saturday) BLUE MASH NATURE TRAIL/OAKS LANDFILL. Half day. Interesting walk at these adjacent and surprisingly birdy sites in Montgomery County. Waterproof boots helpful at Blue Mash, but not needed at the landfill. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Zion Road parking lot. Reservations required. Limit: 8 to 10 participants. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Mark England at 240-375-4500 (cell) or markengland@canamcontractors.com.

APRIL 26 (Sunday) 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 waterbirds on the move and early songbird migrants. Possible birds include Purple Finches, Blue-winged Teal, swallows, and maybe even an American Bittern. Meet at 7 a.m. at the Hughes Hollow parking lot. Reservations required. For more information and reservations, contact the LEADER: Ed Patten at epatten1022@verizon.net.

MAY 3 (Sunday) OCCOQUAN BAY NWR. 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 raptors and migratory warblers, vireos, thrushes, and flycatchers should be present, and rails and bitterns are possibilities. Meet at the parking lot in the center of the refuge at 7:30 a.m. Reservations required. Limit: 25. Contact the LEADERS: Mike Bowen at 301-530-5764 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com, or Gerry Hawkins at 571-277-8406 or maineusa@comcast.net. Directions: From Maryland, take Rt. 495 south to I-95 south; take LEFT Exit 161 (Woodbridge), follow Rt. 1 south, cross the Occoquan River, turn left at the light onto Dawson Beach Road, and follow this road to the end.

 **MAY 3 (Sunday) LITTLE BENNETT RP.** Half day. Near peak migration for warblers and vireos, including those breeding in this varied habitat. Reservations required. For reservations, time, and directions, contact the LEADER: Gemma Radko at 301-514-2894.

MAY 5 (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. Contact the LEADER: Wallace Kornack at 202-338-7859.

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Field Trips

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MAY 9 (Saturday) IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE, B-CC CHAPTER, CONSERVATION FARM. Half day. Again this year, the B-CC Chapter is generously providing access for a field trip to this large private property south of Poolesville. Woods, hedgerows, streams, fields, and ponds provide a wide range of bird habitats, and migration should be on its way by this date. Meet at 7 a.m. at the League's Chapterhouse. Reservations required. Limit: 12. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson at kingfishers2@verizon.net or 301-530-6574.

MAY 9 (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/MDMayCountList2014.xls), 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 are also acceptable.

MAY 10 (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. Reservations required. For reservations and more information or directions, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack at 202-338-7859.

MAY 13 (Wednesday) WHEATON REGIONAL PARK. Warblers, flycatchers, vireos, and orioles should all be here on this easy morning walk in an interesting park. Limit: 10. For more information about meeting time and place and for reservations (required), contact the CO-LEADERS: Woody and Rae Dubois at denguel@verizon.net.

Youth Backpack

Patrick Newcombe was this year's Montgomery Bird Club youth backpack winner. Patrick is in seventh grade at Norwood School. He attended the YMOS birding program ("Maryland Birds and Habitats Summer Institute") at Washington College last June and wished it would never end! He has thoroughly enjoyed his first YMOS trips this fall. Patrick read his essay on the Red Knot at the October meeting of the Bird Club.

My Favorite Bird: The Red Knot

My favorite bird is the Red Knot. The Red Knot breeds in the arctic tundra, but winters at the southern tip of South America. There and back again is over 18,000 miles. The Red Knot, weighing less than a cup of coffee, often flies over open water with almost no landmarks for long periods of time. To complete this massive endeavor, it must have brilliant navigational skills. Its body changes before each massive journey. The flight muscles enlarge, as well as the amount of fat. The gizzard and stomach shrink into much smaller sizes. One famous Red Knot, B-95, has now been proven to live for 21 years, as many of you may know. B-95 was first banded in 1995, and has now flown the distance to the moon and halfway back again. These birds are incredibly tough survivors, and their ability to change

their bodies in preparation for gigantic flights is part of why they are my favorite bird.

The Red Knot also symbolizes to me why we need to save the Delaware Bay and the horseshoe crab population. This amazing bird depends on horseshoe crab eggs to make the leap from the Delaware Bay to the next stopover site. Another reason I admire the Red Knot so much is that it has evolved to time its migration so that it stops in the Delaware Bay when the horseshoe crabs come out of the water to lay eggs on the beach. To me, the way Red Knots time their arrival to the Delaware Bay based on horseshoe crabs is fascinating.

A few weeks ago, I went to Cape May with YMOS, the youth division of the Maryland Ornithological Society. It was a brilliant trip, topped off with a lifer Red Knot that landed on the rocks in front of Avalon Sea Watch.

The Red Knot, with its long-distance travel, captures my imagination. I think of all the places it sees, all the other birds it encounters. The Red Knot evokes a spirit of adventure and survival, a spirit of imagination, a spirit of the past and the hope that it will continue to make its incredible journey in the future. ♪

— Patrick Newcombe



Trip Reports

Oaks Landfill, Sunday, November 2. Leaders: Mark England and Ed Patten. It is always a great opportunity to be able to bird this closed landfill. The fall trip by MBC is noted for raptors and sparrows. This trip was no different, and we also had a few late migrants. The day was cloudy and very windy, but we still found 35 species. The raptors included Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk. The sparrows included Field, Savannah, Grasshopper, Song, Swamp, White-throated, and White-crowned Sparrows. Late migrants included House Wren and Indigo Bunting.



Lois Y. Green Park: Remembering Lou, Sunday, November 9. Leader: Ed Patten. This trip was a memorial walk for Lou DeMouy. Several of his family members attended as well as MBC members. It was a clear day that started off cool and warmed into the 50s. We ended up with a nice total of 35 species. Highlights included Ring-necked Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, and Red-shouldered Hawk. Eastern Bluebirds outnumbered American Robins by about 4 to 1, and we had a total of 12 Carolina Wrens. It was a very pleasant day outdoors—good people and good birds.



LBJs at Blue Mash, Tuesday, November 11. Leader: Lydia Schindler. Eight of us enjoyed one of the last gorgeous days of the fall, and one another's company. We had good looks at 30-some species, including Song, White-throated, Field, and Fox Sparrows—the latter first singing their lovely song, then perched in full view. Most of the large pond was bone dry; the far corner held eight Green-winged Teal. There were Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, both Kinglets, Waxwings, just three Yellow-rumps. The trip will be remembered, though, as the Day of the Robin. Scores and scores—hundreds—of Robins flooded the air—flitting, bathing, feeding, chattering, cackling, chasing.



Blackwater NWR, Saturday, November 15. Leaders: Ed Patten and Mark England. We had an excellent turnout for this trip and ended up with five cars carpooling to Blackwater NWR and surrounding areas. We had a total of 61 species for the day. Highlights included Tundra Swans, eight species of Ducks, and 21 Bald Eagles. Other raptors included Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, and American Kestrel. There were good numbers of passerines including Brown-headed Nuthatch.

Occoquan Bay NWR, Sunday, November 23. Leaders: Gerry Hawkins and Mike Bowen. Participants: 14. Weather: Cool to start but warming nicely with clear skies and little wind. Species: 66. Highlights: 8 sparrow species (plus Junco), with lots of Songs and White-throateds and a few Swamps and Fields. Two (Red) Fox Sparrows and a beautiful American Tree Sparrow were the standouts. Juvenile White-crowned Sparrows were also great to find. We found an astounding 4 different Brown Creepers, which must have been migrating through. Eastern Bluebirds again almost hit the 50 mark—this refuge is a wonderful place to see the species wintering. Waterbird watching was tougher this year, as hunting on the previous day had scattered many ducks. The only large rafts we saw were of Ruddy Duck and Lesser Scaup. There were a few Canvasbacks in with the Scaup and a single “mystery bird” with the Ruddies, which was originally thought to be a female Ring-necked Duck but turned out to be a female Redhead. (Thanks to photographer Rich Galloway for the diagnostic photo.) A few Mallard, Shoveler, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, and a single Greater Scaup rounded out the duck department.

Not many Grebes this year—only 3 Pied-billed and 2 Horned—and the gulls were all of the usual 3 wintering species plus a couple of late-lingering Laughing Gulls. Raptors included 2 Cooper's Hawks, 4 Red-shouldered Hawks, and 9 Bald Eagles. A single Brown Thrasher was glimpsed, along with 2 late Gray Catbirds, an Eastern Phoebe, and a curious Hermit Thrush. Golden-crowned Kinglets were in good numbers. Cedar Waxwings, feeding on poison ivy berries, were very numerous. With over 60 species on our list, we had a very good day, but were nevertheless sorry to miss such “regulars” on this trip as Savannah Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird, and Bonaparte's Gull.



Earliest Bird Trip, Thursday, January 1, 2015. Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 14. Weather: Cold but mostly sunny, 22 degrees, rising to about freezing by the time we quit. Species count: 42. Highlights: A Pied-billed Grebe and a female Red-breasted Merganser were about all we could find at Georgetown Reservoir, and we stayed there only long enough to pick up two distant Killdeer, thanks to a great piece of spotting by Michael Bender. Moving on to the Constitution Gardens pond, we found it to be substantially frozen, but the open sections nevertheless gave

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Trip Reports

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us 35 Ring-necked Ducks; a drake Northern Shoveler and three female Gadwall were mixed in with a closely packed mess of Mallards. Next stop was the FDR Memorial. Disappointment that the Tidal Basin was empty of birdlife except for two Bufflehead mutated to happiness when the trees between the basin and the memorial turned out to harbor both kinglet species, White-throated Sparrows, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a White-breasted Nuthatch, and not one but two Brown Creepers. Once again a small group of Black-crowned Night-Herons greeted us at the head of the Washington Channel—an estimated seven this year. There weren't many ducks close by in the river, but we were able to find several Redheads in with a group of Lesser Scaup. But then raptor fever erupted: we spotted four Bald Eagles, two flying and two perched side by side. Just after, we watched a Merlin zooming around at high speed, systematically flushing crows from their perches in the big trees by Hains Point. To top things off, two Peregrine Falcons were seen through the scopes, sitting close together on the 14th St. railroad bridge. Off then to the LBJ Grove and Columbia Marina, a locale we missed in 2014. Here we had our only Hooded Merganser and Ruddy Duck of the morning. Passerines were scarce or perhaps just lying low. No Winter Wren this time (a sure thing in prior years). A few of us stopped off briefly at Roaches Run before looping back to Georgetown Reservoir

by way of National Airport. Roaches had more Hooded Mergansers and Pied-billed Grebes and a single Great Egret. The egret was seen from the leader's car just as we were exiting the parking area to rejoin the parkway and constituted the 42nd species of the day. Not bad for the Nation's Capital on a cold January day!



Lilypons, January 4. Six brave souls, plus the leader, were undaunted by the fearsome weather forecasts of rain and more rain and were rewarded with a mostly dry morning, with the only impact being the rather gloomy conditions because of heavy cloud. Although we did not locate all of the variety and number of birds found on the CBC the weekend before, we nonetheless found most of our target species. Everyone got reasonable looks at American Tree Sparrow, and we also found a single White-crowned Sparrow, increasingly hard to get in midwinter in Lilypons. Northern Flicker were abundant, and we found an Eastern Phoebe hanging on in the wooded impoundments. Not surprisingly given the weather, we did well on the ducks, with Northern Pintail, American Black Duck, Mallard, and Gadwall. Common Ravens put in an appearance, some distant birds being identified on their distinctive structure. A visit to New Design Road at the end of the trip did not turn up Lapland Longspur, but we did get nice views of Horned Lark and a male American Kestrel. In total we saw 39 species.

In Case You Missed It...

In "Citizen Science: The Power of the Crowd" (November/December Audubon). Chan Robbins is profiled as "The Pioneer." "Fifty years after launching the Breeding Bird Survey, 70 years after starting a career in bird conservation, and nearly 100 years after his birth, Chan Robbins is still watching closely," writes author Jeff Hull. He goes on to describe some of Chan's many accomplishments—his groundbreaking studies about DDT; his seven decades of work at Patuxent Research Refuge; the creation of the Golden Guide; and the Breeding Bird Survey. ♣

Linda Friedland, Evelyn Ralston, and Jennifer Kawar had some company as they counted birds for the Seneca Christmas Bird Count last December. National

Geographic reporter Christy Ullrich Barcus accompanied them and wrote about it in "Audubon's Christmas Bird Count Turns 115: Why Does It Matter?" Visit <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/12/141227-christmas-bird-count-anniversary-audubon-animals-science> to read the article. ♣

It's not just for kids! If you were worried about the lack of monarch butterflies in our area last fall, the *Washington Post's* "Kidspost" had some good news to report: tentative reports on their annual fall migration from Canada and the northern United States to Mexico show that the population is growing once more. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is conducting a year-long review to see whether the government should step in to provide protection for the butterflies and their habitats. See www.monarchwatch.org for information on ways to help. ♣



Birds of Note (late October 2014 to early January 2015)

Trumpeter Swan is the lead-off bird of interest for this issue's "Birds of Note" column. The swan was reported to eBird on 11/15 by Robin Skinner and found at Little Seneca Lake within Black Hill RP. The bird has a yellow tag that reads #M78 pointing its origins to Toronto and birth year as 2013. The bird was still being seen in and around Little Seneca Lake as well as nearby Lake Churchill as recently as 1/16/15.

A **Common Redpoll** has been another great bird to show up in the county recently. A female bird has been coming to the feeder station at the Black Hill RP Visitor Center and was found initially by Linda Friedland on 1/2/15. The bird, being seen in the company of a few **Pine Siskins**, was still reported as of 1/16.

A flyover flock of 52 **Snow Geese** was spotted by Jeff Sceपुरa over Brown's Bridge Road on 11/14. A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was seen by Ryan Webb at Black Hill RP on 1/11. Anna Urciolo reported two **Cackling Geese** at Black Hill RP on 1/4. A **Black Scoter** was found along the Potomac River near Violette's Lock by Mary Ann Todd on 11/1.

Dave Czaplak and Mary Ann Todd found a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** in Gaithersburg on 12/28.

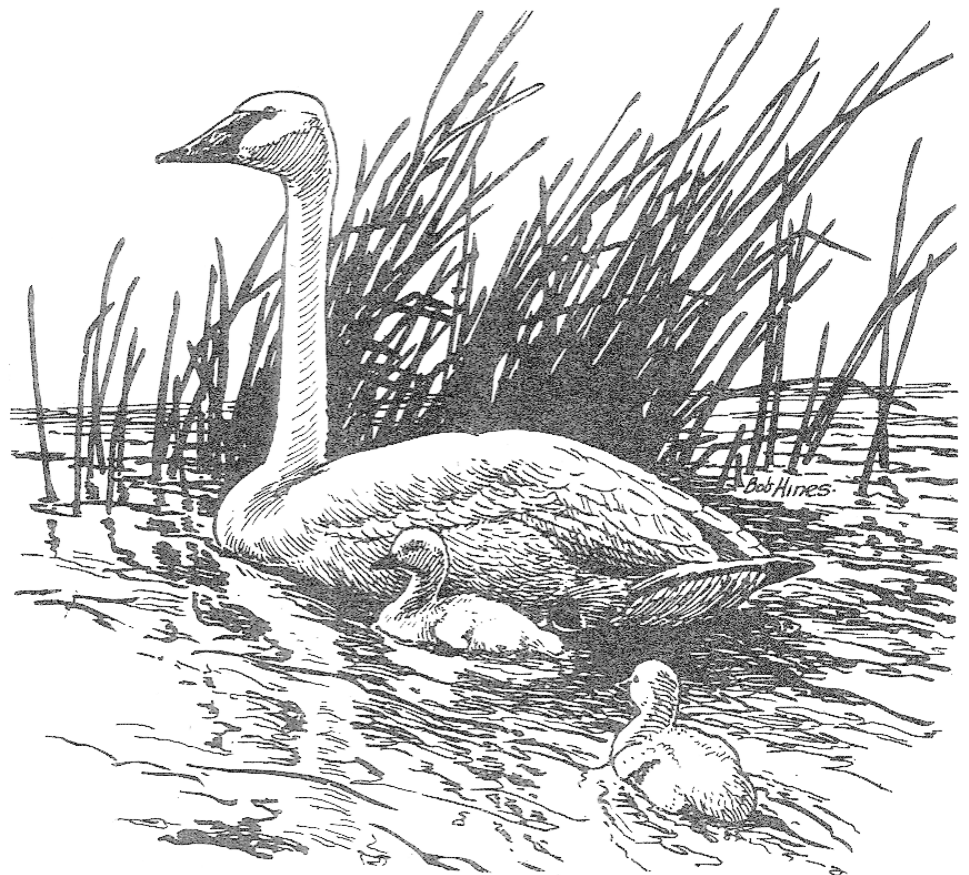
Dave Czaplak was able to pick out a single **Iceland Gull** among a flock of 104 Herring Gulls flying upriver over the Potomac River near Violette's Lock on 12/14. Eight **Great Black-backed Gulls** were also mixed in with the Herring Gulls. Robert Ostrowski found a **Great Black-backed Gull** on the Potomac River at Little Falls 1/1.

Robert Ostrowski reported a **Merlin** from Gunners Lake on 1/1. Alex Baish noted a **Peregrine Falcon** in Rockville on 1/4. Dave Czaplak spotted an immature **Golden Eagle** in flight, high over the Potomac River near Violette's Lock on 11/9.

Some nice winter finds include Stan Smith's **Gray Catbird** at Blue Mash on 1/1 and Adam Parr's **Lincoln's Sparrow** along the Long Branch Trail near Silver Spring. Paul Woodward noted three **Red-headed Woodpeckers** at Hughes Hollow on 1/2 and a **Brown Thrasher** there on 1/10. Robert Ostrowski picked out two **Red-breasted Nuthatch** at Hoyles Mill CP near Boyds on 1/1. Blue Mash continues to be one of the most consistent spots for **American Tree Sparrows** in the county with reports of occurrence in both December and January.

A total of 249 bird species were reported in the county this year, excluding Dave Felley's **Henslow's Sparrow** and Evelyn Ralston's **Monk Parakeet**, which did not get counted by eBird. This is short of 2012's total which was 257. The top five listers in the county this year include Mary Ann Todd at 224, Dave Czaplak at 218, Linda Friedland at 202, "Team Dubois" (Woody and Rae) at 197, and Lydia Schindler at 193. †

—Andy Martin



2014 Christmas Count Results

Seneca, Maryland/Virginia, December 14. Count day, falling on the first day of the CBC count period, was partly cloudy with temperatures rising from around freezing into the 50s. We had 116 counters—the highest number participating in the last 10 years. On this 56th Seneca CBC, they found 94 species on count day with four additional “count week” species. This 94 is below the average for the last 10 years. We tallied about 28,500 individual birds, also below average for the last 10 years.

On the count day, one team found a species new for the Seneca CBC—Cackling Goose, the first identified in the count circle since this species was split from Canada Goose. This brings the cumulative, all-time species total for the Seneca CBC to 162. We also had two special count week birds. A male Summer Tanager visited a feeder in Potomac for three days before the count although he did not show up on count day—a first for the Seneca CBC. Then an Iceland Gull was observed over the Potomac from Violette’s Lock on the C&O Canal on the count day but not by an official observer, so it also goes down as a count week species. This is the second record of an Iceland Gull on the Seneca CBC (the previous bird, also a count week species, was in 1976). Other notable birds counted this year and not found every year include Redhead, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Great Black-backed Gull (count week), Red-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, and Pine Siskin.

A writer for the National Geographic accompanied MBC members Linda Friedland, Evelyn Ralston, and Jennifer Kawar as they participated in the Seneca CBC. The nice article, which features them prominently, can be found at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/12/141227-christmas-bird-count-anniversary-audubon-animals-science/>.

Thanks to everyone who came out to count this year and especially to the sector leaders for their hard work before, during, and after the count. †

—Jim Nelson

Washington, DC, December 20. The District of Columbia Christmas Bird Count was chockfull of highlights and surprises this year. One group spotted a

Snowy Owl at National (Reagan) Airport, for only the third sighting of this species in the 72-year history of the count. A Snowy Owl was reported on the 1945 and 1949 counts and that has been it up until this year. Further south a team observed a Cackling Goose, three Dunlin, and a Lesser Black-backed Gull at Hunting Creek below Alexandria. A third team reported and photographed a juvenile Surf Scoter at Dyke Marsh, while an additional group saw and heard a Common Raven flying over Glover-Archbold Park northwest of Georgetown. Small numbers of Purple Finches and Pine Siskins were reported. Count week birds included an American Bittern and Northern Harrier at Dyke Marsh and a Greater White-fronted Goose at Hunting Creek. I have not received reports from several sectors, so there may be other notable birds in this year’s count. Needless to say, the Snowy Owl has been drawing viewers to Reagan Airport since count day and probably will be the most remembered bird of the 72nd DC CBC. †

—Larry Cartwright

Triadelphia, December 20. It came off—mostly successfully! We enjoyed the highest number of participants since 1999—67. But we spent less time out. Our party hours only totaled 150 plus 7½ hours owling. That’s the least we have had on a decent weather day in 20-some years. Is your territory really that much worse? Or are we simply busier?

Our species total was 88, plus a Saw-whet Owl during count week but not on count day. This is quite a decent total since the Oaks Landfill closed. Our total for individuals comes in around 42,000, which is more than the last several years. Guess the most numerous bird on this count! No—not starlings or blackbirds. It was robins—11,921 of them! Almost 10,000 were in a flock near the dam for Rocky Gorge Reservoir. This doubled our previous high count.

Birds that were more exciting by their relative rarity were Pine Warbler for possibly only the fifth appearance on the count, Long-tailed Duck for its sixth, Common Loon for its eighth, and Lincoln’s Sparrow for its ninth. The Pine Siskin was counted for only the third time since 1999, so it has to be described as “recently rare.” The Common Ravens joined us in 2010, and the six individuals from four



sectors tied our previous high count. The closed landfill hosted another Short-eared Owl, for the seventh out of the last eight years. The three House Wrens tied our previous high count. They only show up on roughly one year in four on this Christmas Bird Count.

Waterfowl were spotty. We had not had the hard freeze to drive them in from their scattered farm ponds. Our worst other misses were Screech Owl, Eastern Phoebe, and Horned Lark. The biggest “WHEW!” was probably the single Red-breasted Nuthatch (there are more of those across the Bay Bridge). Most other species were discovered in relatively average numbers.

We were delighted to welcome a newly organized crew from Brookside Nature Center (thank you Lisa and Brady) and three high school kids who had a mom as chauffeur and did a really nice emergency job on a sector in need! Thank you Kevin, Alex, Patrick, and mom, Lisa!

We welcome feeder counters and still had some Montgomery County areas with minimal to no coverage. We can do better!! Great thanks to ALL of you who counted! Hope to see you next year!! †

—David Holmes

Central Loudoun (MD Sector), December 27. Seven hardy birders arrived at the parking lot at White’s Ferry to participate in the Montgomery County section of the Loudoun Christmas Count. Jim Nelson was the only veteran of this count. This year we had two young birders along with their parents—Lisa and Patrick Newcombe and Jason and Aiden Excell. Patrick was our chapter’s recipient of this year’s MOS Youth Backpack award (see page 4), and he put his binoculars and skills to good use today. Aiden is a 7th grader who was participating in the count as part of his requirements toward getting a Boy Scout merit badge in birding. Carolyn Smith, who just received an MOS scholarship to Hog Island, rounded out our group.

The weather was just a little chilly at 30 degrees at 7:30 a.m., but the forecast was for warmer temperatures by noon, when we typically finish our walks.

We all rode down in Lisa’s car to our starting spot about four miles below White’s Ferry on old River Road. Jim, Lisa, and Patrick bushwhacked their way through the woods to get to the C&O Canal towpath, and the rest of us started walking back along the road.

Jim’s group picked up all of the usual suspects that are to be found along the canal, plus a few Field and Swamp Sparrows in the open cut area. Those of us who hiked along the road had two Common Ravens, several Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, an American Kestrel, a Sharp-shinned Hawk and 28 Ring-billed Gulls.

Our total for the day was 47 species, and, of course, it was a beautiful day to be out contributing our two cents as Citizen Scientists! †

—Anna Urciolo

Sugarloaf Mountain Christmas Bird Count, December 28. The 30th annual Sugarloaf Mountain CBC took place on December 28 in mild, calm, mostly dry weather—a vast improvement over last year’s dismal downpour. Sixty-three enthusiastic volunteers tallied an above-average 93 species, including several that are seldom seen and one completely new to our cumulative list: Blue-headed Vireo. New high counts were reached for Cackling Goose, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Pileated Woodpecker, Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Towhee, and Chipping Sparrow. Double-crested Cormorant and Common Raven tied their previous highs, and Fish Crow and Carolina Wren numbers were near their record highs. Although no species hit record lows, Mallard and American Coot numbers came close.

Bob Ringler’s impressive sighting of the Blue-headed Vireo brings our cumulative species total to 151. Another exciting find was the shrike (species uncertain) reported by Chris Wright and Wayne Gordon. Shrikes haven’t been seen on this count in 15 years.

The day ended with a very enjoyable Tally Rally at the Black Hill Regional Park Visitor Center, hosted by the newly formed conservation group Friends of Ten Mile Creek & Little Seneca Reservoir (learn more about their mission at www.tenmilecreek.org). Thank you to them and to everyone who participated!

Who knows what terrific birds will show up on future counts? The next Sugarloaf CBC will be held on Sunday, January 3, 2016. See you then! †

—Janet Millenson



ANNUAL MBC SOCIAL

Friday, March 20, 2015

Guest of Honor: Jim Nelson

Join us for our annual social 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. Smokey Glen Farm of Gaithersburg will once again cater this delicious dinner.

The evening will feature the traditional members' slide show. Please limit your presentation to your 10 favorite digital photos and send them to the compiler Clive Harris in digital form (either on a CD or a thumb drive) in the order you want them to be shown, **no later than March 11.**

Because space is limited, places will go to the first 90 persons to reserve and pay. Send this form (or a copy) and your check (\$20 per person), payable to Montgomery Bird Club, to Clive Harris, 6507 75th Place, Cabin John, MD 20818. Clive's e-mail is clivegharris@yahoo.com

Name(s) to appear on tags:

Phone #: _____

Signup deadline is Wednesday, March 11.

_____ 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

