

the Chat



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

February 2018

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President's Chat

This has been a very cold winter recently, but there have been a lot of great birds around in the county and the state over the last two months for people to chase. Chasing rarities has really grown in popularity here in recent years. Perhaps it's that better information is available, almost in real time, through text groups and through eBird. The advent of county listing means people chase birds that are rare or unusual in a particular county, rather than just in the state. And we certainly seem to have more people out in the field looking at birds. Perhaps we haven't reached the scale of some of the twitches in the UK, which is the spiritual home of this activity, but we are getting close.

But with all these people out chasing birds, sometimes in neighborhoods or on private land, we need to make sure that birders are well behaved and don't offend landowners or neighbors in the zeal to see the bird in question. It only seems appropriate to thank all those who have provided access to birders, or helped manage the influx of birders keen to see a local or regional rarity, and to those who manage access to private lands. Particular shout-outs should go to Terry Cummings of Poplar Springs Animal Sanctuary, where a drake Eurasian Wigeon has returned for the second year; Joshua Heiser, for literally hosting (at least in his driveway) hordes of birders from around the state seeking the Shiny Cowbird, and also for making neighbors aware and making us birders aware of what would be acceptable; and all those others who grant us access to private lands for our CBCs. We really rely on these people and their goodwill. Winter will soon turn to spring and as Club President, aside from returning migrants, it's very much on my mind that spring is nominating season. As always, we are



looking for volunteers to help run the Club, so please think if there are areas where you can help the club, or whether you know someone who would make a great club officer! This club depends on dedicated enthusiasts who get stuff done, organize meetings and social events and put on our great programs.

I hope to see you soon at one of our club meetings or at the Social at Woodend on March 9th. Further down the line we have the annual Club Picnic.

—Clive Harris

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Upcoming Club Meetings

February 21, 2018 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. George Jett on Ethiopia. George will be giving one of his inimitable programs on Ethiopia. Since retiring from the EPA thirteen years ago, George has been traveling the world taking pictures for conservation. He will share photographs from his trip to Ethiopia in May of 2011. The focus of his trip was on endemic birds and the Ethiopian Wolf, but he studied and photographed anything that would cooperate.

March 9, 2018 (Friday), 6:30 p.m. Montgomery Bird Club Annual Social. The selection of the Member of the Year is announced; our favorite entertainment, members photographs and a delicious dinner for our annual get-together.

April 18, 2018 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. Mike Hudson on Red Knots. Just in time for the Northward migration, Mike will be bringing us up to speed on the Red Knot story. Mike Hudson is currently a senior at Washington College, where he is studying Biology and English. In April 2017, he was appointed an editor of North American Birds, the American Birding Association's journal on bird status and distribution. When not in class or working on NAB content, he works as an intern bird bander at the Chester River Field Research Station, where he has been for seven consecutive seasons.

May 16, 2018 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. Gail Mackiernan on Madagascar. Gail will give her highly anticipated program on Madagascar. Madagascar is the world's fourth-largest island and is often referred to as the "Eighth Continent". Its unique fauna and flora have evolved during millions of years of isolation and are a "naturalist's dream." Over 140 endemic species of birds (and five endemic bird families!) are found here, as well as a fascinating supporting cast of lemurs, chameleons, frogs, weird insects and even stranger plants. Gail Mackiernan will talk about her November 2015 trip, which explored this ancient land from south to north and recorded many of the island's most sought-after species.

June 9, 2018 (Saturday), 5-8 p.m. Montgomery Bird Club Picnic. Please join us for the Montgomery Bird Club picnic at Black Hills Regional Park, Shelter H. Bring a dish to share—we will eat and then go birding in the early evening. Please remember no alcoholic drinks are allowed in the park—please bring sodas, water, and iced tea. Families are most welcome!

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 Road (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 Clive Harris, clivegharris@yahoo.com or 301-320-9769.

Club News

The Montgomery Bird Club offers its condolences to Helen Gray and her family on the passing of her husband, David, on December 4. Contributions in his memory may be made to the Audubon Naturalist Society.

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

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Visit our homepage at
www.montgomerybirdclub.org

Deadline for submissions is the 5th of the preceding month.
Send items to Patrick Newcombe, 12005 Smoketree Road, Potomac, MD 20854, phone: 301-424-3259, e-mail: stonecroft5@verizon.net



Field Trips

February 18 (Sunday) OAKS LANDFILL, LAYTONSVILLE. Bundle up for a LATE AFTERNOON search for wintering sparrows and raptors, including possible N. Harriers and Short-eared Owls (both consistently seen this winter). We have special permission to enter this “closed to the public” landfill so reservations are essential. FULL. Contact the leader to be put on the waitlist in case of cancellations. Limit 20. Meet at 3:30 pm. on landfill entrance drive at 6001 Rt. 108, Laytonsville, Md. LEADER: Mark England markengland@canamcontractors.com or 240-375-4500 (cell).

March 7 (Wednesday), March 13 (Tuesday), and March 15 (Thursday) INFORMAL LATE AFTERNOON BIRD WALKS until dusk. Joint trips with Audubon Naturalist Society. Meet promptly at 4:30 pm at the end of Seneca Road at Riley's Lock "on the bridge." We'll be checking out the Potomac River for waterfowl, gulls, terns, etc. Next stop will be Hughes Hollow - part of McKee-Beshers Wildlife Management Area. Potential highlights here include early Tree Swallows, calling Pied-billed Grebes and Wood Ducks and other waterfowl flying into roost. We'll then finish with American Woodcock display if they are in the vicinity. Bring scope, flashlight and wear "muddy conditions" footwear. Reservations are not required - all are welcome. For more information, call the LEADER: Jim Green 301-742-0036.

March 10 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, Jug Bay Natural Area, Prince George's County. Half day. Joint trip with Audubon Naturalist Society. Waterfowl, Wilson's Snipe, winter and early spring songbirds, Ospreys displaying. Meet 8 a.m. at the parking area by park headquarters. Wear muddy conditions footwear. Reservation required. Limit: 15. LEADER: John Bjerke johnbjerke1@mac.com

April 8 (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 are not required, but please contact the leader if you are planning to come so he can provide additional information before the trip. LEADER: Jim Nelson kingfishers2@verizon.net or 240 515-4517.

April 15 (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, Virginia. 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. LEADERS: Mike Bowen, 301-530-5764 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com, and Gerry Hawkins, 571-277-8406 or maineusa@comcast.net.

April 21 (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. Call leader for reservations and directions. Trip is limited to 8-10 participants. LEADER: Mark England markengland@canamcontractors.com or (240) 375-4500 (cell).

April 22 (Sunday) HUGH MAHANES PRESIDENTS' WALK AT HUGHES: HUGHES HOLLOW. Half day. Participation of all former Chapter Presidents is encouraged, and everyone is welcome. This is a wonderful chance for newer birders to be in the field with “old hands” who enjoy sharing what they know. With a variety of habitats, Hughes Hollow is always interesting in spring. We will look for water birds on the move and early songbird migrants. Possible birds include purple finches, blue-winged teal, swallows, and maybe even an American Bittern. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Hughes Hollow parking lot. Reservations required. LEADER: Clive Harris clivegharris@yahoo.com.

May 4 (Friday) BIRDING BY EAR AT HUGHES HOLLOW. Tune up your ears as we listen for and learn to identify the songs and calls of migrant and local breeding birds. The trip will be geared to new birders but all are welcome. Meet at 7 a.m. at the parking lot at Hughes Hollow. Limit 10. Reservations required. LEADER: Paul Woodward grackling@ATT.NET

May 6 (Sunday) IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE, BETHESDA-CHEVY CHASE CHAPTER, CONSERVATION FARM. Half day. Once again, the B-CC Chapter is generously providing us access 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 well underway. Trip will start at 7 a.m. at the League's Chapterhouse. Reservations required. Limit 12. Driving directions will be provided to those who make reservations. LEADER: Jim Nelson kingfishers2@verizon.net or 240-515-4517.

MAY 13 (Sunday) - ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. Near peak time for migrant warblers, vireos, etc. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at Picnic Area #18, one-half mile below the Nature Center on Ridge Road. Reservations required. LEADER: Wallace Kornack (202) 338-7859.

JUNE 2 (Sunday) - OLD LEGISLATIVE ROAD, ALLEGANY COUNTY. This is a great spot for Henslow's Sparrow and Golden-winged Warbler, both state-rare breeding species. We'll also spend time birding along other country roads for Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Grasshopper Sparrow, and more. Meet at the Urbana Park and Ride at 7:00 AM. LIMIT: 10. LEADER: Gemma Radko: 301-514-2894 or gradko@yahoo.com.



Meet a Trip Leader: Andy Martin



Andy Martin is a familiar name to many members of the Montgomery Bird Club and the Maryland Ornithological Society. We thank him for all the time and effort he has put into the club, and would like to provide members with the opportunity to learn more and be inspired by his interest in birding and the

Montgomery Bird Club.

Year joined Montgomery Bird Club: My best recollection would be 2002.

Volunteer positions with MBC: Field trip leader, Writer for The Chat: Birds of Note column and also some misc. articles over the years, State Director, and Chapter Director. I served on a few Nominating committees as well as chaired one committee. Organizing and tending the bar for the MBC Socials!

Year began leading bird walks: I lead a Montgomery County Waterfowl Search in March of 2006.

Favorite bird: Northern Shoveler.

Favorite bird book: Actually, not a book but a CD-ROM entitled Flight Calls of Migratory Birds of Eastern North American Landbirds by Bill Evans and Mike O'Brien.

Favorite Montgomery County birding spot: Weirdly enough, I would pick my yard. Not necessarily because it offers anything special "birdwise" but more due to the fact that I love detecting something unusual from its confines... either by hawk watching from the driveway, recording nocturnal flight calls overhead at night, listening for interesting birdsong during migration and/or just trying to be aware of my surroundings every time I step outside the door...

Picking a Montgomery County spot in the field, it would probably be the stretch of River Road that takes you through the (formerly called) Patton Turf Farm area. I think it's called Battlefield Turf Farm now.

How did you start birding: I started working from home in 1999. In fall of 2000, I helped my six year old son, Bobby, with a "make your own" bird feeder project for school. We decided to put up that bird feeder in backyard. I purchased the "newly published at the time" Sibley Guide to Birds to help identify the species visiting the feeder. After identifying the ten to fifteen regular visitors to my backyard feeder, I began to wonder where the other 900 or so species listed in Sibley might be found and an addiction was born.....

Something that inspires you about birding: The fact that you can always be birding by sight or sound no matter what else you are doing... from your house, or at night, in a store parking lot waiting for your wife, at work, while sleeping (if I have my nocturnal flight call recorder set up), even while watching TV, etc.

Significant birding accomplishments: 1) All the nice folks I have met and friends I have made through birding over the past 17 years.

2) Almost close to the 1,000 mark on my life list and I'm hoping an upcoming trip to Panama in March of 2018 will do the trick.

3) Detecting the nocturnal flight call of an Upland Sandpiper over my house in Gaithersburg and also flight calls of Barn Owls. Posted some of the nocturnal flight calls I have recorded to a website I created, <http://nightmigrants.com>.

4) Knowing most of the Eastern bird calls and song by ear.

Memorable birding experience: There was a six or seven day stretch around Thanksgiving 2004 when an Eared Grebe, a Red-throated Loon, a Sandhill Crane and two Cave Swallows all showed up in the county. I left the house multiple times (including at one point, the Thanksgiving dinner table) to chase each one, getting all but the Cave Swallows. I remember my wife and my mother-in-law (who was visiting for Thanksgiving) thought I must have gone nuts. And I also remember thinking to myself "how could something (birding), be so fun and enthralling and still escape my notice until age 38?"

Welcome New Members!

Lisa & Marc Auerbach

David Hunter & Margaret Bowman

Bonnie Bell

David Burns

Michael

Cunningham

Jim Dempsey

Jack & Elaine
Gates

Roxana Laing

Elizabeth Mautner

Charlotte Moser

Steve & Sandy Sundlof

James Tate



An Interview with Noah Stryker, author of *Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, a Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World*

Noah Strycker recently published *Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, a Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World* describing his "epic quest" to see as many birds as possible in 2015. The journey took Noah to 41 countries on all 7 continents, and by the end of the year, he surpassed the record by 1700 species at 30 years old. Noah averaged 12 new species a day, seeing a total of 6,042, the majority of species in the world.

For big years, Noah's stands out. He traveled on a budget, really making the year about how he would be able to find the birds. Instead of outsourcing to big tour companies, he used connections from eBird, Facebook, Birding Pal, and listservs to find local friends and guides. The whole time, he carried one 40-liter backpack. Impressively, he only counted birds that were identified by someone else at the same time. Noah emphasized adventure and the experiences of international travel as well as the birds. In his recent book, he reflects this balance by talking about his many unique experiences rather than a diary of every place his visits. He blogged daily on the National Audubon Society's website, building an international following. This book should receive no less.

Patrick: What values or character traits helped you with your big year?

Noah: While hiking the Pacific Crest Trail in 2011 -- a 2,650-mile back-country trail that runs up the western mountains from the Mexican border to Canada -- I learned the value of working slow and steady on a long-term project. Except for a brief break for a knee injury, I hiked every day for four months. Likewise, in 2015, I birded nearly every single day. As Woody Allen says, 80 percent of success is showing up.

Patrick: When things didn't go as expected, what helped pull you through?

Noah: Life never goes as expected. That's its charm. The same thing is true of travel. There's hardly any point to taking a trip that doesn't offer some kind of surprise, good or bad, and I was determined to roll with it -- and keep my eyes on the prize.

Patrick: What allowed you to maintain your discipline with writing blogs and social media every day?

Noah: People began reading my Audubon blog and commenting or sending me emails right from the beginning of the trip. By the end of the Big Year there were thousands of readers connecting from around the world every single day. That gives you a lot of energy, even when you're dead tired!

Patrick: What advice would you give to a young birder?

Noah: Bird as much as you possibly can. Visit strange, far-off, beautiful places and bird them when you can afford to, but get out close to home, too.

Patrick: Why did you choose a birding oriented career rather than research?

Noah: I really enjoy adventure, being out and about. Also, I began to make some money from my writing, which allowed me to keep birding and travel without having to get a "real" job.

Patrick: What role did a bird club and/or mentors play in you making a career out of birding?

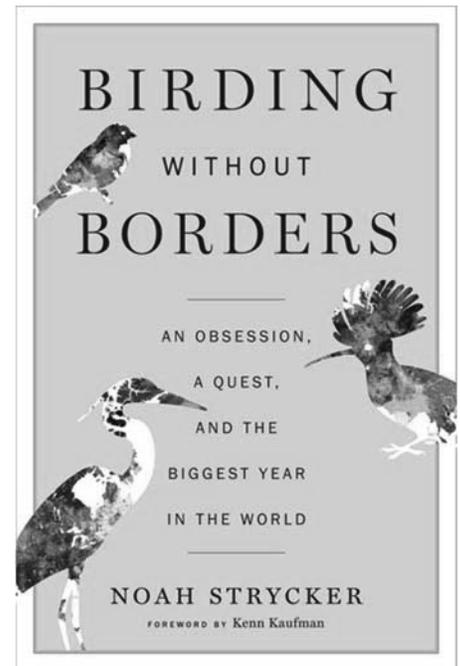
Noah: That helped a lot. My parents love the outdoors and started me hiking and backpacking when I was barely big enough walk, but they don't know birds. So, connecting with the local bird club at home was great; birders who knew what they were doing took the time to teach me and go birding with me.

Patrick: Do you have any suggestions of ways to encourage young birders?

Noah: Read all the birding magazines you can find. I like *Birding*, of course, because I'm an Associate Editor there. The American Birding Association also has an annual young birder competition that I would recommend -- I entered the contest for several years, and it helped focus my attention on birding steadily, connecting with other birders, and keeping records of what I saw in the field. The judges for the contest are awesome -- and their feedback and encouragement meant the world to me.

Noah Strycker has also written two other books, *The Thing with Feathers* and *Among Penguins*. His blog documenting his journey is at <http://www.audubon.org/features/birding-without-borders> and a recent ABA podcast is at <http://blog.aba.org/2017/11/american-birding-podcast-birding-without-borders-with-noah-strycker.html>. We thank him for taking the time to do this interview and encourage members to read his excellent book.

—Patrick Newcombe



Christmas Bird Counts

Triadelphia Reservoir CBC, December 16, 2017.

Preliminary report – the 70th. It was a nice morning and a decent afternoon. There were some birds! All results are still preliminary and need additional proofing, editing, and a couple of confirmations. But, our species list seems to be 89 which is quite good for recent years. Bird numbers are totally skewed by a flock of 150,000 Red-winged Blackbirds in the southeast segment of the circle. Without the blackbirds, we reported about 31,000 individual birds. New high numbers were reported for Wild Turkey (36), the Red-winged Blackbirds, and a high tie came in for Northern Harrier (12).

Some of you found out about our craziest birds in time to get over and see them: two young King Eiders were found in late morning on Triadelphia Reservoir and created quite a traffic jam around Brighton Dam. Alas, they were one-day wonders. The next best bird was possibly the adult male Baltimore Oriole at a feeder just south of Columbia. It only stayed for two or three days and then one turned up in Anne Arundel County. It might be new for our total count list (I couldn't easily get into that data) but they are not unknown in the winter here. Red-breasted Merganser, House Wren, and a still to be confirmed Lincoln's Sparrow appear two or three times a decade.

Sixty-six field observers and three feeder watchers helped us find all these treasures. This number seems to be trending slightly upward – at least since the 2000's. If you were one of us, GREAT THANKS!! But, party hours in the field were fairly average. And, we are really scant for owlers. We could surely use some more early morning go-getters! I will look forward to having you join us next year. Our count will be on Saturday, December 15, 2018. Reserve that day!! Happy birding!

—David Holmes, Compiler

Seneca, Maryland/Virginia CBC, December 17, 2017.

We had seasonable weather for count day. On this 59th Seneca CBC, our 135 intrepid counters (highest number of participants since 1995) found 98 species on count day, above the 96 average for the previous 10 years. Ten additional species, eluding our counters on the count day, were only found during “count week” (the period starting 3 days before and ending 3 days after the count day) for a grand total of 108 species, just shy of the record 110 in 1995 and well above the 10-year average of 99. The 34,015 individual birds counted are the highest total since 2007.

In spite of the warm fall and early winter we had good waterfowl diversity. We had fewer of the other expected winter visitors. As with last year, the fall weather may have helped give us some unusual species. Most notable were a Eurasian Wigeon and a LeConte's Sparrow that may well be

the same two birds that were the first ever for our count last year (each found in the same location as last year). In addition, counters found 2 Sandhill Cranes (8th ever and possibly the same two birds as last year), a Ring-necked Pheasant (1st since 2004 but of questionable origin), a Rough-legged Hawk, and an American Woodcock (1st since 2011). Other notable results include new all-time highs with 55 Tundra Swan, 178 Pileated Woodpecker, and 4 Merlin; highest count for Canada Goose since 2002 (almost double the 10-year average); second highest count ever for Hooded Merganser, Fish Crow, and Chipping Sparrow; highest count for Barred Owl since 1986, much better than average counts for all the other woodpeckers, and better than average counts for all sparrow species except Dark-eyed Junco. On the other end of the spectrum are the low counts -- Red-tailed Hawk (lowest since 1969!), Rock Pigeon (lowest since 2009), no Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper (lowest since 2000), no American Pipit, and only one Pine Siskin.

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. I will post a more detailed report on the Club's website.

—Jim Nelson, Compiler

Sugarloaf Mountain CBC, December 31, 2017. Despite bitterly cold temperatures and biting winds, nearly sixty brave souls participated in the 33rd Sugarloaf Mountain Christmas Bird Count on December 31 — and racked up 89 species, our best number in three years. It was a surprisingly rewarding day.

We completely blew away our previous record high tallies for Northern Pintail, Common Merganser, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Thrasher, and Chipping Sparrow. Tallies for Short-eared Owl (last seen 27 years ago!), White-throated Sparrow, and Eastern Towhee also hit new highs.

Feeder-watcher, Robin Skinner, in Sector 11 (Little Bennett) contributed a new species to our cumulative list: a well-documented Pine Warbler. Most sectors reported eagles and/or ravens, but as of this writing those totals haven't yet been corrected for double-counting.

Only a few species reached new lows, probably because so many bodies of water were frozen: Mallard and Ring-billed Gull (even including the tally of unidentified gull species). Great Blue Heron tied its previous low. All our “regular” species were seen, however.

Thank you to all the dedicated volunteers who made these great results possible! The next Sugarloaf CBC will be held on Sunday, December 30, 2018. Hope to see you then!

—Janet Millenson, Compiler



Trip Reports

Montgomery's Big Sit, October 7. Leader: Chuck Parker. Participants: 7. Species: 47. The Saturday morning Big Sit at Black Hill Regional Park was attended by seven birders who were treated to perfect weather and fresh coffee and donuts provided by Ed Vigezzi. A total of 47 species were seen and the highlights included a Great Egret that hung around the entire day, a Bald Eagle, great views of Wood Ducks and a Nashville Warbler.

Blue Mash Nature Trail, October 10. Leader: Stephanie Lovell. Participants: 3. Species: 23. An intimate group we were as the three of us walked around Blue Mash on a damp and dreary morning. It promised rain any minute, but held off until we finished our tour. Temperatures were in the low seventies and it was very humid. First off, of course, a Carolina Wren let its presence be known, and then several Blue Jays harassed a large hawk, probably the resident Red-tailed Hawk, but he flew off before we could identify him. The first pond was totally dry, half a dozen or so Killdeer inspecting the flats, but no ducks, with no water! The second pond only held a Great Blue Heron, and looked very scummy. We heard Towhees and Cardinals. We saw a Field Sparrow and a Song Sparrow. Kinglets were about, both Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Golden-crowned Kinglet. A Yellow-rumped Warbler showed himself; and a well-hidden Mockingbird gave a symphony of bird calls! Fly overs included a Cooper's Hawk, Canada Geese and American Crows. We ended up with not a bad list for a very gray day where it was hard to distinguish color.



Blue Mash Nature Trail, Remembering Lou, October 28. An annual morning walk in honor of former MBC president and all-round naturalist Lou DeMouy who passed away in the fall of 2012. Leader: Andy Martin. Participants: 15. Weather: Chilly morning but warming quickly into a superb fall day. Species: 42. Highlights: I always enjoy leading this walk for the club, which was moved from last year's location at Lois Green Conservation Park (CP) over to Blue Mash. Lois Green CP, although a lovely park, can sometimes be a bit noisy due to its close proximity to the Montgomery County Airpark. We were honored to be joined on the trip by Lou's daughters, Bridget and Amy, as well as Amy's husband and their daughters (Lou's grandchildren). Blue Mash looked to be back in a great shape from a flora perspective. Many areas of the park seem to have recovered from the aggressive invasive plant control implemented in 2015 by Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC). Although the "big" pond adjacent to the old landfill was bone

dry, we did find some early migrant waterfowl in the "small" pond near Zion Road, including a female Gadwall, American Black Duck, a couple of Blue-winged Teal and a flock of 13 Green-winged Teals. Initially, we were disappointed at spooking the Green-winged Teal into flight before getting good looks but the flock then proceeded to fly back and forth over and around the pond area for 4-5 minutes providing a great opportunity to study this small duck species in flight. Sparrows were in good supply although getting good views was a bit difficult with all the lush vegetation. We ended the morning walk with 7 sparrow species, a nice look at a "getting late" Palm Warbler and an impressive total of 4 different Hermit Thrush. Non avian highlights included a few American Lady Butterflies and Lydia Schindler found a tree frog species (either Gray or Cope's Gray) along the path allowing the whole group to enjoy great close looks at this diminutive but very cool amphibian.



Sparrow Walk at Blue Mash, November 14. Leaders: Lydia Schindler and Linda Friedland. Participants: 6 including leaders. Species: 38 Unseasonably chilly weather and a heavy cloud cover didn't deter our hardy group as we searched the brushy areas of Blue Mash for little brown jobs. We were rewarded with many White-throated, several Song, a few Field and at least five handsome Fox Sparrows. Along the way we found both Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets as well as numerous Eastern Bluebirds. The sky cleared a bit and raptors made a welcome appearance: Sharp-shinned, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks and an unexpected Bald Eagle.

Occoquan Bay NWR, November 1. Leaders: Gerry Hawkins and Mike Bowen. Participants: 4. Weather: Exceedingly windy, so windy that some signed-up participants begged off. Species: 38 (way down from previous years). Very large flocks of Lesser Scaup and Gadwall at a considerable distance; Horned and Pied-billed Grebes and a single Common Loon; 15 Canvasbacks and single Bufflehead and Ruddy Duck. The vicious winds kept small birds under cover most of the time, but we did eke out a Winter Wren and both Kinglet species. Our sparrow haul was disappointingly low -- we missed Swamp Sparrow and Fox Sparrow for the first time on this trip for many years. 50 Yellow-rumped Warblers were (literally) cold comfort! The eBird checklist for the trip can be found at: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40597456>

Trip Reports

Lilypons and Surrounding Areas, November 26, 2017.

Leader: Clive Harris. A large group of us gathered for the annual MBC trip to Lilypons. Compared to previous trips, this one came up rather short in terms of finding key species and diversity of birds. We had 5 species of duck, including a nice showing of 8 American Black Duck. Strong winds throughout the morning made searching for songbirds rather challenging. It took most of the morning to get decent views of Swamp Sparrow. We did however get nice views of a couple of White-crowned Sparrows back by the parked cars. The total of 42 species was below par.

Cambridge, December 10, 2017. Leader: Mark England. Participants: 10 including leader. Weather: Quite cold and windy in the morning, but clear and sunny. Species: 54. We met at the Sailwinds Dorchester County Visitor Center one hour later than usual, due to the forecasted overnight road freezing. We had good views of waterfowl on the Choptank River, including Surf Scoters, probable White-winged Scoters, one each Common Loon and Red-throated Loon, Bufflehead, and a distant group of scaup. As we headed back to our cars, two Peregrine Falcons flew by the visitor center, one only 20 feet overhead, remarkably close! At the Cambridge Marina, we had the usual Ring-billed, Herring, and Great Black-backed Gulls, but also two Lesser Black-backed Gulls on the pier. Along Egypt Road, the wind kept sparrows down, but we did pick up Savannah Sparrows and some other nice birds including Northern Harrier, RT Hawk, Bald Eagle, E. Meadowlark, and Black-bellied Plover. At the first stop on the Blackwater Wildlife Drive, we had excellent view of dabblers including N. Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Black Duck, Gadwall, and a Wood Duck in flight, and had close looks at an immature Red-headed Woodpecker and an adult Bald Eagle at a later stop on the drive, as well as N. Pintail and a Cooper's Hawk. We finished the afternoon at the marsh at Bestpitch Ferry Road Bridge, and had good looks at harriers and a couple of Short-eared Owls, thanks to a tip from Lynn Davidson of Anne Arundel County.

"Earliest" Bird Trip – Georgetown Reservoir and D.C./VA Hotspots, January 1, 2018. Leader: Mike Bowen. Participants: 11. Weather: 11 degrees F at the start, with increasing NW breezes. It was COLD! Without doubt the coldest New Year's Day in the 15 years the club has run this trip. Almost 40 degrees below the balmy temps. on New Year's Day 2017. Species: 38 Highlights: Despite the weather (or perhaps because of it – bodies of water were partly or totally frozen, confining water birds to small patches of open water), we had a simply sensational morning. There were Mallards and Canada Geese of course, 33 Common Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck and Redhead at Georgetown Reservoir, Black-crowned Night-herons on the

Washington Channel/Hains Point leg, together with Hooded and Common Merganser and Pied-billed Grebe, many more Mallards and Hooded Mergansers at Roaches Run in Arlington County, where we also spied a male Wood Duck, a Lesser Scaup, a Bufflehead, another Redhead, more Ring-necked Ducks and (best of all, rather uncommon in these parts) a female Common Goldeneye. We finished the morning at the Washington Sailing Marina just below National Airport, adding Gadwall, Black Duck, Wigeon, Shoveler, Canvasback, and a zillion Coots. Our decision to emphasize waterfowl meant that we didn't spend much time looking for land birds and, indeed, our only notable find in that department was an immature Yellow-bellied Sapsucker seen briefly near Hains Point. The several Bald Eagles seen included a feisty duo in an aerial duel over Roaches Run. Many thanks to all the participants for handling the brutal weather with aplomb and to Gerry Hawkins for recording the eBird checklists.

Oaks Landfill, February 4, 2018. Leader: Mark England. Participants: 12. Weather: Dreadful!—34 degrees with a steady, soaking rain. Species: Very few, but. . . Some very hardy birders joined me on a car-birding trip around the landfill. We had hoped for a bit of intermittent rain, when we could get out of our vehicles and look for sparrows or possible perched raptors, but with no letup in the rain, we made a slow pass around the entire property. But, we saw only a few Song Sparrows, and a lone Red-tailed Hawk, which flushed as we drove past. With the birds all hunkered down, we then drove to the top of the landfill, which is always the best spot to see Northern Harriers and (usually) Short-eared Owls. We caught a glimpse of a Northern Harrier on the way up, and were encouraged by that. Then we parked at the very highest spot of the landfill and waited a good while, but saw only a group of Mallard fly-bys and probable Red-winged Blackbirds. I decided it was worth checking the lower end of the landfill, as it was past 4:30, and Short-eared Owls should have been hunting by then, based on past experience. We picked up another couple of Northern Harriers, including a male "gray ghost", and then drove slowly down the center road on the lower end of the landfill, trying to get a better look at the Northern Harriers. At the first grassy path to our left, I stopped the car, as Thomas Doebel and I were amazed to see a ground-roosting female Short-eared Owl right out in the open, no more than 20 feet away. I rolled my window down so Thomas could quickly snap some photos, then we moved up so others could see the bird. The owl did flush, but only flew a short distance, allowing the photographers in the group to get some great pictures, and the rest of us had superb views through either binoculars or the spotting scope. It was a very cooperative bird! Though most of us were cold and soaked, it was a happy group when we left at 5:30.



Birds of Note(Oct 2017—Jan 2018)

Shiny Cowbird and **King Eider** top the list of the best birds found in the county over the past two to three months!

On October 22, Joshua Heiser noted an unusual Icteridae mixed in with a flock of Brown-headed Cowbirds and few European Starlings in his North Bethesda backyard. The bird turned out to be a **Shiny Cowbird**. Not only a first record for Montgomery County but also for the entirety of Maryland! Despite an intensive effort to relocate the bird in the following days, it could not be found. However, on November 23, Joshua resighted the bird in his backyard and quickly got the word out. Since that time, the bird has proven to be exceptionally cooperative and was still being reported from the same location into early 2018.

Not as cooperative as the Shiny Cowbird but still a mega rarity for the county were reports of a couple of immature **King Eiders** at Triadelphia Reservoir on December 16. Russ Ruffing initially spotted the eiders. This sighting marks the first report of an inland King Eider in Maryland since 1991. The pair proved to be only a “one day” wonder however, and were not seen after December 16.

For a great way to start 2018, Scott Young found an immature **Brant** mixed in with a flock of Canada Geese at Lake Placid in Gaithersburg on January 1. Brant were last reported in the county in 2012 and 2004. On November 7, Rob Garriock reported a **Greater White Fronted Goose** feeding with Canada Geese at a small pond between 6011 Executive Blvd (National Institute of Health building) and Montrose Pkwy in Bethesda. Thomas Doebel reported a Ross's Goose from Black Hill RP on January 7. Flyover Snow **Geese** were noted on November 4 over Dry Seneca Creek Park; November 9 by Sharon Polidoro over Lake Churchill; and December 14 by Dave Czaplak over the Potomac near Violette's Lock. **Cackling Goose** were spotted at a number of locations around the county over past few months including Violette's Lock, Gunner's Lake, Clopper Lake, Black Hill RP, Lake Placid, and Blue Mash.

Justin Culotta found a male **Eurasian Wigeon** in the barn yard pond at the Poplar Springs Animal Sanctuary (PSAS) during the Seneca CBC held on December 17. It mostly likely was one of the same two birds that was wintered their last year. A male Eurasian Wigeon was also reported from the Potomac adjacent to Violette's Lock by Peter Bengtson on December 21. Dave Czaplak reported a **Black Scoter** at Violette's Lock on November 6 and four Surf Scoters and a

single **White-winged Scoter** from the same location on November 9.

A single **Red-necked Grebe** was seen on the Potomac at Riley's Lock on December 13.

An **Iceland Gull** was observed in flight over the Potomac near Violette's Lock on November 23. Bill Adams and Dave Roberts were among the Montgomery County birders who noted late **Spotted Sandpipers** at Violette's Lock in early November.

Lydia Schindler and Linda Friedland reported a flyover **Golden Eagle** at the Oaks Landfill on November 4.

Peregrine Falcons were noted from a number of locations around the county October through December.

A **Sedge Wren** was a great find at Little Bennett Regional Park by Dave Roberts on October 14.

Some lingering passerine migrants around the county over the past few months include a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**, **Pine Blackpoll**, and **Tennessee Warbler**. Robin Skinner reported a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in her Clarksburg yard on October 27. It also appears that she is hosting a wintering Pine Warbler which has been seen at her feeders through December 31. Tim Guida came across a Blackpoll Warbler in Sligo Creek Park on December 9. Dave Czaplak found a late Tennessee Warbler at Rickman/Woodstock Equestrian Park on November 4.

Michael Bowen spotted a **Clay-colored Sparrow** at Rickman/Woodstock Equestrian Park near Dickerson on October 20. Late **Grasshopper Sparrows** were reported in October by Ed Vigezzi and Dave Czaplak. Jared Fisher found a lingering **Lincoln's Sparrow** at the power-line cut in Cabin John Creek RP on November 18.

According to Cornell University's eBird project, 251 different bird species were reported in Montgomery County for 2017. 251 is just a little short of last year's total of 255. Highest total in the last five years is 258 species found in 2012. Top bird getters for 2017 include: Dave Czaplak, 232, and Dave Roberts at 214. Also notable were other 7 Montgomery County birders who broke the 200 mark for this year including Nathan Tea, Ed Vigezzi, Robin Skinner, Woody and Rae Dubois, Scott Young and Tom Kimbis. Good job to all!

— *Andy Martin*



Oaks Landfill Solar Photovoltaic Project

After being tipped off by two MBC friends, I attended a meeting about the “Oaks Landfill Solar Photovoltaic Project” on October 23 at Laytonsville Elementary School. I was keenly interested in this meeting as I have led birdwalks at the landfill for both MBC and ANS for several years, and had no inkling of this proposed solar panel array.

It was a very small group, with two representatives from the contractor, Tesla Solar, three from the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and only four interested citizens, including me. I found out that a previous meeting had taken place in 2016, when this project was first proposed, and that the current meeting was to address any questions or concerns about the project, but it was quite clear that the project was going ahead, with a large solar array to be installed in spring 2018. I asked how many acres would be used for the installation, but no one knew exactly, and we were given estimates of between 15 and 18 acres on the southeast end of the Oaks Landfill, out of about 125 on the hill.

We were told that the existing vegetation would remain, but be mowed regularly around the solar panels, I asked about the “lake effect” illusion sometimes caused by reflective solar panels, which has elsewhere caused waterbirds to crash into them, thinking that it is water they are landing on. A Tesla representative said that the panels were absorptive, not reflective, and there had been no bird kill problems on previous solar array installations they had done on other landfills.

The county DEP representatives were quite excited about the clean energy savings projected to be about \$350,000 annually, but listened respectfully as I expressed concerns about the loss of habitat for nesting, migrating, and overwintering birds at the landfill. They seemed to already know that the landfill hosts a variety of bird species throughout the year, many uncommon in the county. The projected area to be utilized had nesting Dickcissels, and Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows this year, and is also hunted by several raptor species, especially in the colder months.

It will be interesting to monitor this project next year to see how it might affect the birds there.

—Mark England

Easy Birding and More on Sycamore Landing

If you missed last fall’s birding trip with the Audubon Society, Sycamore Landing Road is off River Road in Poolesville, near McKee-Beshers Wildlife Area, one of my family’s favorite spots for easy birding. When you turn onto it there’s a sign that says “The Kimbis Family”. Under the Adopt A Road program for Montgomery County, my family adopted Sycamore Landing Road. In addition to birding, once a month we visit the road to pick up trash and keep the road clean. The best part about this is that my sister and I earn Student Service Learning (SSL) hours for just picking up trash! To the other kids in need of SSL hours reading this, you can too! If your family adopts a road, you can get your SSL hours and go birding as well (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOIT-dir/adoptaroad/index.html>).

As a less popular hotspot, the road connects directly to the C&O Canal and is a great place for birding! From hawks to warblers, there are always a lot of birds to see. Recently, there was even a sighting of a Sabine’s Gull! The road is so beautiful, next to a patch of sunflowers, and it’s very easy to walk. It’s very short but there are still many, many birds to be seen. And since it leads directly to the canal, you can easily see migratory ducks and bald eagles, who are constantly fishing in the river. This part of the canal is a great spot because the paths are level and smooth, and there’s not too many bugs. Those are the best parts, for me. There’s such a variety of birds that visit Sycamore Landing. Visitors have recently seen cuckoos, sandpipers, grosbeaks, orioles and terns, just to name a few. Every time of day, every time of year it seems like there’s something different and new to see. For kids with a lot of school stress like me, and who value their sleep, you don’t have to get up super early to see the birds. They’ll be there later in the day too. Not to mention how beautiful the area is! It’s peaceful for walking, and the canal is spectacular for photography. It’s one of my go-to places when it comes to shooting assignments for my photography class. Sycamore Landing is a great place to visit if you’re looking for birds, a spot for photography, or both. Go check it out if you haven’t already!

—Kelly Kimbis



What an exciting winter for Short-eared Owls in Montgomery County!

Thank you to Mark England for, not only leading his scheduled trips, but organizing extra trips to share his sightings of the Short-eared Owls at the Oaks Landfill, a “closed to the public” area in Laytonsville. We appreciate all his time and effort in making these opportunities possible! His latest trip report can be found on page 8.

Short-eared Owls in Maryland



Photo credit: Patrick Newcombe

Short-eared owls are migratory visiting Maryland mainly in the winter. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) considers Short-eared Owls to be endangered in the state and a Species of Greatest Conservation Need. According to the DNR, Short-eared Owls nested historically in Maryland but no

breeding pairs have been documented in recent years. In addition, Short-Eared Owls are very sensitive to habitat fragmentation meaning that they will not nest (or have significantly reduced nesting success) in areas below a certain size and that Brown-headed cowbirds are a greater nest threat.

While the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) rates Short-eared Owls a species of “Least Concern,” the IUCN notes the species has “undergone a large and statistically significant decrease over the last 40 years in North America (71.2% decline over 40 years, equating to a 26.7% decline per decade...) BirdLife International. 2015. *Asio flammeus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2015: e.T22689531A80598940.

Creating Memories: Short-eared Owls

We wait in the bitter cold. Time passes as the sun lowers behind the mountains. “Maybe they haven’t come back this year,” my grandfather comments with a tinge of disappointment in his voice. Then we spot the Northern Harrier flying low over the field – like seeing an old friend and knowing things haven’t changed. Yet we still wait.

In the twilight, I scan the long grasses with my binoculars and then my scope searching everywhere. “Maybe we’ve somehow missed them,” my grandmother whispers.

Just as I’m about to reply, two Short-eared Owls rise out of the grasses and then there are three more. In silence, we watch the five owls begin to hunt flying low over the ground even passing overhead as they cross the road to the field

below us. One perches on a tree near us. All too soon, it is dark.

My grandparents are not avid “twitchers” yet I will always remember the late afternoons I have watched for Short-eared Owls with them – not only for sharing a memorable experience and quiet moments but also because of the effort they have taken to spend time with me doing something I love.

—Patrick Newcombe

Interesting facts about Short-eared Owls

- They are found on every continent except Australia and Antarctica.
- They prefer to be out in open country such as grasslands, rangelands, bogs and marshes.
- They have been found in reclaimed strip mine sites preferring open lands with low disturbances (vs. farmlands).
- They make a raspy, nasal barking sound “kee-ow”.
- Males perform an acrobatic sky dance during courtship as well as “barking” and clapping their wings.
- Females nest on the ground by scraping a bowl-shaped depression and using grasses and weeds as materials.
- Unlike many other owls, they are crepuscular hunters, foraging and hunting in the early evening hours but ceasing to hunt after nightfall.
- In Europe, they form communal roosts during the winter (up to 100). For many years, there was a roost in Princeton, New Jersey of 200 Short-eared Owls.
- The 2014 State of the Birds Report listed Short-eared Owls as a common bird in steep decline.



Photo credit: Thomas Doebel





The Chat
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 PAID
 Permit #2737
 Suburban, MD

Shelly Qualkenbush
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Annual MBC Social—Friday, March 9, 2018

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.

Bring appetizers to share.

The evening will feature the traditional members' slide show. Please limit your presentation to your 10 favorite digital photos; send them to Scott Young at wsyacy@verizon.net in digital form (on a thumb drive) in the order you want them to be shown, no later than **March 2, 2018**.

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:
 Stephanie Lovell - 15302 Pine Orchard Drive 3K - Silver
 Spring - MD 20906
 Stephanie's email is ctlovell1@yahoo.com

Name(s) to appear on tags:

Signup deadline is March 2, 2018.

Please check here if you would like a vegetarian meal. _____

Vegetarian lasagna will be available.

Reservations at \$20 per person \$_____ enclosed