

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

August 2011

Volume 42, No. 3

It's been a good year for the club! Many fine field trips, orchestrated by Linda Friedland. Really interesting and varied speakers at our monthly meetings, arranged by Anna Urciolo. A great new web presence, now in the talented hands of Eric Skrzypczak. Interesting sightings near and far, and accounts of wonderful trips that many of us were able to make. A new birding site for us in Montgomery County — the Izaak Walton League property in Poolesville. A strong club presence at the MOS Conference at Wisp. And at that conference, our own Don Messersmith garnering one of the top awards of the American Birding Association!



outsiders will not have access to them. But, of course, you may choose not to be listed if you wish!

Also, you can now give us your cellphone number as well as your home phone. Many birders find cellphone communication especially valuable in the field.

We hope that by making this info optional, we've balanced privacy concerns with a desire for easy communication among our members.

Good birding! ♪

—Steve Pretl

And now we're poised to do the same thing all over again. Different details, of course — different rarities visiting the area, different speakers gracing our podium, different weather challenges. But the Montgomery Bird Club will continue to stand out because of the wonderful people who are our members. Our members include really top-notch birders, leaders, and teachers, while at the same time we warmly welcome birders of all experience levels. I think we have an organization we can be very proud of. Let's keep thinking of ways to advertise the club and to bring in even more new members.

Because this is the start of the club year, you'll find the membership renewal form on the last page of this *Chat*. This year, we have added two new options on information sharing:

Please indicate whether your email address can be shared with other members. Since these addresses will be in the members-only area of our website,

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Fall Calendar

September 14 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., “A Year on the Road with North American Birds.”

*Note meeting date on **second** Wednesday.* During a Lower 48 “Big Year” in 2005, *Ron Gutberlet* visited all 48 of those states, drove about 70,000 miles, hiked over 100 miles, took six trips by plane (three specifically for birding), and spent nine days at sea. He met boat captains, truck drivers, a midwife, backpackers, sheriff’s deputies (uh oh!), state troopers (UH OH!), border patrol agents (no problema), car mechanics, vacationing families, park rangers, mountain bike chicks, whale watchers, a naturalist surfer girl, hobos, and the poet laureate of Boise City, Oklahoma. And of course, he met birders. It was quite a year, and Ron looks forward to sharing a bit of it.

October 19 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., “State of the Birds.” *Greg Butcher*, Director of Bird Conservation for the National Audubon Society, will present a “State of the Birds” program explaining how the Christmas Bird Count data and Breeding Bird Survey data help determine which birds are of conservation concern.

November 9 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., “Wildlife of Northern Ecuador and Amazonia.” *Note meeting date on **second** Wednesday.* *Suzanne Dater* spent two weeks in northern Ecuador in late May and early June 2010 observing and photographing wildlife. The areas she visited were sites four to five hours drive from Quito in the northeastern and northwestern slopes of the Andes, between 3,000 and 11,000 feet, east to the Napo River, a tributary of the Amazon, and finally flying back to Quito to drive and hike up to the cloud forest. She will show photographs of 85 species of beautiful birds (including 20 species of hummingbirds) as well as landscapes, plants, and flowers of the region.

December 21 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m., “Birding in the Land of the Thunder Dragon — Bhutan.” The Himalayan Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan is one of the world’s premier birding destinations, both for its variety of superb species and its enlightened environmental policies that have protected the extensive forests and their wildlife. Only open to tourism since 1979, Bhutan welcomes birders and other lovers of natural beauty. *Gail Mackiernan*, her husband, and three friends traveled to Bhutan in 2010 — their second trip to this wonderful country — and again saw many beautiful birds, splendid scenery, and a unique and vibrant culture.

Meetings take place at the Potomac Presbyterian Church, 10301 River Road, Potomac. From the Beltway, take Exit 39 (River Rd/Rte 190) toward Potomac. After crossing Falls Rd (Rte 189), continue a quarter-mile to Gary Road on the right. Turn right on Gary Road, then take an immediate left into the church parking area. (OK to park in the adjacent elementary school lot as well.) Meetings take place in the Fellowship Hall, ground level. Doors open at 7 p.m. Cancellation policy: Club meetings are canceled if Montgomery County schools have been closed. If you have questions, contact Steve Pretl at 202-413-8351 or stevep@takomavillage.org.

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

Editor: Susan Hunt **Designer:** Gemma Radko **Circulation:** Jane Farber and Jeanne Lacerte

President: Steve Pretl: 202-413-8351
email: stevep@takomavillage.org

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

Visit our homepage at www.montgomerybirdclub.org

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



Condolences

The club offers its condolences to Howard Lefkowitz on the death of his son Ted on May 5.



Chit-Chat

One of the three winners of last month’s National Geographic bird book quiz was Montgomery Bird Club member **Jackie Cooper**. Winners were chosen at random from those who had correctly answered the question: “Delaware Bay annually hosts thousands of shorebirds every May as they stop to feed on horseshoe crab eggs on their way to their Arctic breeding grounds. What are the four most predominant shorebird species in these annual late spring stopover concentrations?” The answer: Red Knot, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, and Sanderling. Jackie won a copy of the *National Geographic Backyard Guide to the Birds of North America* by Jonathan Alderfer and Paul Hess. †

Diane Ford reported seeing her 300th state bird on February 23, 2011, when she saw the Harlequin Duck at Fort Armistead in Anne Arundel County.

If you get a chance to take in the first Washington, DC, episode of *Antiques Roadshow*, be on the lookout for a couple of very familiar faces toward the end — our own **Gail Mackiernan and Barry Cooper**. †



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.).



AUGUST 24 (Wednesday) LEADER'S CHOICE! Half day. Call leader for meeting time and location. Bring scope, snack, and insect repellent. Trip will likely cover parts of the C&O Canal and other areas along River Road; however, the decision on a meeting place will be made at the last minute based on previous sightings, reports, etc. All are welcome. For more info and directions, contact the LEADER: Jim Green, 301-742-0036 (cell) or jgreen@smokeyglenfarm.com (Jim will not check email after 3 p.m. the day before the trip; after that, contact him by cellphone).



SEPTEMBER 7 (Wednesday) LITTLE BENNETT RP. Half day. Meet at 7:30 a.m. to bird some of the trails of Little Bennett Park for migrant and resident birds. Expect to walk 2 to 3 miles on gravel and dirt trails, with some uphill. Beginners welcome! Reservations required. Limit: 8. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Claire Wolfe, 301-972-4278 or c_wolfe2003@yahoo.com.

SEPTEMBER 10 (Saturday) ASSATEAGUE ISLAND/COASTAL WORCESTER. Full day (to dusk). Bring food, water, sunscreen, insect repellent. Focus will be migrant warblers, shorebirds, and rarities such as Lark Sparrow. Reservations required. Limit: 14. Co-leaders: Bill Hubick and Jim Brighton. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Bill Hubick, bill_hubick@yahoo.com.



SEPTEMBER 11 (Sunday) PENNYFIELD TO VIOLETTE'S BIRD STALK. Half day. For folks who prefer a somewhat later start to their birding, we will meet at 9 a.m. at Violette's Lock parking lot, at the end of Violette's Lock Road. We will carpool to Pennyfield Lock and walk up the C&O Canal towpath to Violette's Lock. This walk should net an interesting mix of late warblers, landbird migrants, and probably a few first-show winter visitors, as we scan the skies and river for raptors and waterbirds. For reservations, contact the LEADER: Jim Nelson, kingfishers2@verizon.net or 301-530-6574.

SEPTEMBER 14 (Wednesday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. Urban birding at its best with one of Rock Creek Park's "Regulars." One-third day. Migrant warblers, vireos, and sparrows. Meet 7 a.m. at Picnic Area 18 (on Ridge Road, half mile below the Nature Center). Reservations required. For reservations and directions, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

SEPTEMBER 18 (Sunday) LOISY. GREEN CONSERVATION PARK. Half day. Explore the varied habitats of this relatively new 204-acre Montgomery County park. Migrant/resident songbirds, raptors, and waterfowl are possible. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at parking lot on 8621 Snouffer School Road, Gaithersburg. Reservations required. For detailed directions and reservations, call the LEADER: Mark England, 240-207-3132 (home) or 240-375-4500 (cell).

SEPTEMBER 18 (Sunday) ROCK CREEK PARK, DC. We've expanded our urban bird walks to include those who can meet only on weekends. One-third day. Same great birds: migrant warblers, vireos, and sparrows. Meet at 6:45 a.m. at Picnic Area 18 (on Ridge Road, half-mile below the Nature Center). Note the earlier meeting time necessary to secure a parking spot. Reservations required. For reservations and directions, call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

SEPTEMBER 24 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, JUG BAY NATURAL AREA. Half day; joint trip with ANS. Driftboat on Patuxent River followed by trail walk. Search for Sora, also migrant and resident songbirds and waterbirds. Meeting time/place: 7:00 a.m. at park entrance gate. Bring fee of \$5/person for park program; boat trip can be cool and a bit damp. LEADERS: Greg Kearns and John Bjerke. Limit: 15. For reservations, contact John Bjerke at 240-401-1643.

SEPTEMBER 25 (Sunday) UPPER WATTS BRANCH PARK, ROCKVILLE. Half day. Migrant warblers, vireos, thrushes, and assorted woodland residents. Meet 8 a.m. at corner of Princeton Place and Fordham Street. Reservations required. Limit: 12. LEADER: Paul O'Brien, 301-424-6491.



OCTOBER 1 (Saturday) LITTLE BENNETT RP. Half day. Everyone welcome but we'll target new birders and focus on some birding basics. Join us for a slow-paced walk listening for and observing common species. Late warblers and vireos, early sparrows, and some raptors possible. Limit: 8. For reservations, time, and meeting place, contact the LEADER: Gemma Radko, 301-514-2894.

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Field Trips

OCTOBER 7 (Friday) WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY MIXED BAG. Half-day trip looking for sparrows (targeting Clay-colored and Nelson's Sharp-tailed), late warblers, and who knows what else. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Lois Green Park. Plan on doing some walking through wet grass in several locations throughout the county. No reservations needed. For directions and further information, call the LEADER: Dave Powell, 301-540-8776.

OCTOBER 8 (Saturday) LILYPONS WATER GARDENS. Half day. Please join us for a joint Montgomery/Frederick County trip to this southern Frederick County hotspot. Target species include American Bittern, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, and a variety of raptors. Meet at Lilypons at 7:30 a.m. Reservations required. For reservations and directions, contact the LEADER: Mike Welch, 301-685-3561 or manddwelch@comcast.net.

OCTOBER 9 (Sunday) BIG SIT. Join the Sitting Ducks at Black Hill RP starting at dawn and continuing until ? Come for the day or just for a few hours. Meet at the dike across the road from the park boat ramp. For info or directions, call the LEADER: Chuck Parker, 240-446-8423 or chparker@access.k12.wv.us.

OCTOBER 30 (Sunday) OAKS LANDFILL. Explore this now-closed landfill adjacent to the Blue Mash Nature Trail. Mostly open terrain on a gravel road, including two pond views and one hill climb of moderate difficulty. Possible sparrows, raptors, and waterfowl. Leader will have scope for distant birds. We have special permission to enter this "closed to the public" landfill so *reservations are essential*. Limit: 16. Meet at 8 a.m. Contact the leaders for reservations and more information. CO-LEADERS: Mark England, 240-207-3132 (home) or 240-375-4500 (cell), and Ed Patten, 301-948-5648.

NOVEMBER 6 (Sunday) LOIS GREEN PARK. Half day. Explore the varied habitats of this new 204-acre Montgomery County park. Songbirds, raptors, and waterfowl are possible. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at parking lot on Snouffer School Road, Gaithersburg, Md. Reservations required. For detailed directions and reservations, call the LEADER: Ed Patten, 301-948-5648.

NOVEMBER 11 (Friday) LBJs AT BLUE MASH NATURE TRAIL. Half day. Blue Mash is hoppin' with Little Brown Jobs, making it a good place to work on the basics of sparrow ID. We'll look for similarities and differences among the common species, like Song and Field and Chipping, while keeping an eye out for less-likely White-crowned and Swamp. This trip is primarily for beginners, but all are welcome. For reservations, time, and directions, contact the LEADER: Lydia Schindler, 301-977-5252 or lydiaschindler@verizon.net.

NOVEMBER 20 (Sunday) LILYPONS/NEW DESIGN ROAD. Half day. Wintering field birds, targeting Fox and Tree Sparrows, possibly Sora and American Bittern. For reservations (required) and more info, call the LEADER: Gail Mackiernan, 301-989-1828.

DECEMBER 11 (Sunday) BLACKWATER NWR. Full day (to dusk). Ducks and thousands of Canada and Snow Geese. Brown-headed Nuthatch possible. Rough-legged Hawk and Short-eared Owl possible in late afternoon. Bring lunch and drinks. Reservations required. Limit: 12. For meeting place, time, and reservations, contact the LEADER: Andy Martin, apmartin2@comcast.net or 301-529-2066 (cell).

JANUARY 1 (Sunday) EARLIEST BIRD WALK AT GEORGETOWN RESERVOIR AND DC HOTSPOTS. Half day. Start the New Year right! Meet at 8 a.m. at Georgetown Reservoir, DC, by the gate leading to the dike between the pools. Reservations required. Limit: 20. LEADER: Mike Bowen, 301-530-5764 or dhmbowen@yahoo.com.



Welcome New Members!

Fred Hoffman

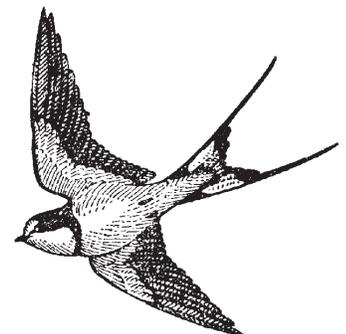
Stephanie Mason

Ghazali Raheem

Ann Reinhart

Richard and Sondra Schoenfeld

Lisa Schreffler



Trip Reports

Blue Mash Nature Trail, Saturday, April 23. Leader: Mark England. Participants: 7. Species: 38. Weather was in the high 40s, overcast, with some rain. A cheerful group persevered through some chilly temperatures, gray skies, and very soggy underfooting due to a downpour the previous night. Newly arrived Common Yellowthroats and Yellow Warblers were reluctant to show themselves at first, but we eventually had good looks at both, but there were no other warblers found this morning. There were cormorants in both ponds, and a Green Heron at the small pond was closely observed in the scope. An Eastern Phoebe was seen near its usual culvert nesting spot, and singing Brown Thrashers and Towhees were well seen. We had mostly the park's "usual suspects," but a fence-perched Bank Swallow from about 20 feet allowed exceptional looks and was the highlight of the walk.



Little Bennett Regional Park, Sunday, May 1. Leader: Gemma Radko. Participants: 12. The day started out cloudy and cool, and we ended the walk amid a shower, but that didn't stop us from seeing some nice birds! Highlights included a pair of Yellow-throated Vireos, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and 13 species of warbler, including Blackburnian, Prairie, Black-throated Blue, and Chestnut-sided Warblers. Another, unexpected incident was the near-loss of one of our participants in a mud sinkhole — fortunately, we managed to pull her out before she sank out of sight!



Rock Creek Park Tour, Part 1, Tuesday, May 3. Leader: Wallace Kornack. Participants: 5. It was one of those days when more warblers were heard than seen. Only the Black-and-white and Yellow-rumped Warblers were seen, but we heard Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Ovenbird. Other birds of interest included the Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, Great Crested Flycatcher, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Eastern Kingbird.

Exploring Calvert County, Wednesday, May 4. Leader: Sue Hamilton; Coordinators: Lydia Schindler and Linda Friedland. Participants: 3. Species: 67. Weather: Wet wet wet. For the first time in 10 or so years of doing this trip, it rained from the get-go. But Calvert County expert Sue Hamilton led us on a driving tour of such choice areas as Solomon's Island — where we picked up Common Loon and Royal Tern — and back country fields, where we heard Bobolinks. We were able to hear or glimpse many of our target birds, such as Yellow-throated and Hooded Warblers and the first Blackpoll of the year, as well as a Summer Tanager. We ended with 67 species, not bad for such a soggy day.



Birding by Ear along the C&O Canal, Friday, May 6. Leaders: Cyndie Loeper and Andy Martin. Participants: 10. Species: 62. On this beautiful Friday morning, unfortunately we were without Ann Lucy's ears, but Andy Martin was a terrific co-leader, and we had many good ear birders with us. Walking from Pennyfield Lock upriver, we heard and saw 62 species with nice views of several warblers — Prothonotary, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-throated, Blackpoll, Yellow-rumped, Northern Parula, and American Redstart — and we also heard Black-and-white, Common Yellowthroat, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Lots of singing Red-eyed Vireos were joined by a Yellow-throated Vireo. Flycatchers were well represented with Acadian, Great Crested, Eastern Wood Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, and Eastern Kingbird. There were lots of Cedar Waxwings feeding in the sycamore trees. A female Ruby-throated Hummingbird gave us great views as she built her nest on a branch hanging well over the canal. We had great views of singing Baltimore Orioles and saw Orchard Orioles in both first-year and full adult male plumage. Scarlet Tanagers sang and gave us great views, and Indigo Buntings were holding forth along the entire length of our walk. White-throated Sparrows were still around as well. A Solitary Sandpiper gave brief views in the second impoundment, and we had nice views of a Broad-winged Hawk and a subadult Bald Eagle joining Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks overhead. Northern Rough-winged Swallows joined the Tree Swallows swooping low over the canal.

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Trip Reports

Izaak Walton League, B-CC Chapter, Sunday, May 8.

Leaders: Mike Bowen and Jim Tate. Participants: 12. Weather was delightfully mild, with early clouds dissipating and 55–70°F. Species: 51. Highlights: Numerous Indigo Buntings perched up and singing, well-seen Scarlet Tanagers, Great Crested Flycatchers, White-eyed Vireo, and Field Sparrows. Best of the disappointingly few warbler species were two singing male Prairie Warblers that gave us great views and were captured digitally by our ace trip photographer, Evelyn Ralston. Evelyn also got beautiful shots of an adorable, just weeks-old Red Fox cub. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo was quite vocal, but we never did spy it. Some visitors from Oregon had several life (Eastern) birds. Probably the most unexpected bird of the morning was an adult Red-headed Woodpecker, possibly from the Hughes Hollow colony a mile or so away. After the trip ended, many of the participants went to Hughes Hollow where, with help from other birders, we were able to see, right in front of us, the rare Purple Gallinule that had been there for several days. A perfect finish to a fine morning of birding. MBC thanks Jim Tate and members of the B-CC Chapter for their warm welcome, hospitality, and refreshments. “The Farm” is a great birding location, and we hope to visit there again.



Rock Creek Park Tour, Part 2, Sunday, May 15. Leader: Wallace Kornack. Participants: 3. The morning started out not too promising following a night of rain. However, the dark clouds gradually lifted, and the tour yielded a good number of warblers and other interesting birds. Foremost among the 11 warblers seen were the Nashville and Canada Warblers located on the back side of the Maintenance Yard. Other warblers included the American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, an uncommonly seen Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Black-throated Green Warbler. It was noteworthy to see over-flights of Great Blue Heron, Wood Duck, and Cedar Waxwings. Other birds of interest were the Great Crested Flycatcher, Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Purple Martin, and Indigo Bunting.

Washington County: Seeking Breeders and Late Migrants, Tuesday, May 24.

Leader: Jim Green. Participants: 7. Species: 90. This day of birding was planned to first look for breeding warblers and thrushes as well as late migrants, spend the middle of the day looking for grassland species (primarily on Broadfording Road), and then finish searching for shorebirds in various places near Hagerstown. Although we did not see or hear *any* migrant passerines the entire day, it was nevertheless a memorable trip.

We saw good birds at several Washington County sites (see the highlights below), but most exciting of all was close to the end of our day when we stopped at the flooded field at Mt. Aetna/White Hall Rds. I was disappointed because the field was substantially dried up from several weeks ago when Dave Weesner and Brad Lanning (both Washington County birders) had a Dunlin and two Glossy Ibis, respectively. From our cars we quickly saw two Killdeer, but then I saw a shorebird that was facing away from me with its rump in the air and feeding in very shallow water. I said out loud “Yellowlegs” (thinking Lesser) and then realized that the bird had *black legs*. It then turned sideways, and I yelled “PHALAROPE.” I quickly let the others in the cars behind us know that we had a Wilson’s Phalarope (male).

We spent the next 40 minutes observing and documenting the bird with pictures and video. Then we started making phone calls. When I reached Judy Linga of the Washington Bird Club, she told me the club was meeting that evening nearby, and she would spread the news. Before we left, several members of the club stopped by on their way to the meeting, and they got to see the phalarope as well. Dave Weesner called later to inform us that the club’s impromptu bird trip to see the phalarope was successful. I later talked to several other birders who went out first thing the next morning but reported that the bird had moved on.

Other highlights in Washington County included a Blue-winged Warbler (Blairs Valley Lake in Indian Springs WMA); Broad-winged Hawks (Mooresville Road); Common Ravens (Mooresville Road and Catholic Church Road); a pair of Bobolinks, an American Kestrel, Eastern Kingbirds, Horned Larks, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Eastern Meadowlarks (Broadfording Road from Clear Spring to Hagerstown); and a Semipalmated Sandpiper at a retention pond off Poffenberger Road.



Trip Reports

Hot Spots for Red Knots, Saturday, May 28. Co-leaders: Kurt Schwarz, Cyndie Loeper, and Bill Stewart. Participants: 16. Bugs in evidence but not horrendous. A typical spring shorebird migration: Dunlins, Black-bellied Plovers, Short-billed Dowitchers including one *Hendersonii* subspecies, Eastern Willets, Ruddy Turnstones, horrifyingly few Sanderlings, Semipalmated Sands, Semipalmated Plovers, Killdeer, and only one Least Sandpiper. We saw a Clapper Rail walking across the road at Fowler's Beach. We saw Black Skimmers skimming and Least, Forsters, and Royal Terns. We did get thousands of the eponymous Red Knots and a number of American Oystercatchers. Although there was lots of excitement about a Little Egret in breeding plumage, no one in the group was able to locate it despite many attempts. On the last stop at Bombay Hook, the weather became changeable — hot, then a downpour, then some sprinkles, then another downpour, then windy and significantly cooler, then it heated up again. Our participants dutifully weathered the storms (pardon the pun!). Highlights included Black-necked Stilts on many nests where we could count the eggs. There was also a colony of Black-crowned Night-Herons as well as around 23 Bald Eagles of varying ages.

Patuxent River State Park, Hipsley Mill Road, Saturday, June 4. Fourteen Howard and Montgomery County birders joined co-leaders Joe Hanfman and Jim Moore, searching for uncommon breeding species in this underbirded area right on the Howard-Montgomery county line. The weather was welcomingly and unseasonably cool, and the trail conditions challenging (as expected), but at least some members of the group saw or heard almost all the target species, including Veery, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, and Worm-eating Warbler. The only real miss was Cerulean Warbler, which was likely in the area but uncooperatively silent. Other birds of note included Yellow-throated Vireo, five more warbler species (Northern Parula, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat), Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Scarlet Tanager.



Trip Tip of the Month: PRACTICE GIVING DIRECTIONS

When you hear a companion say, "There's an oriole in the largest tree ahead at three o'clock," you probably know what that means. The familiar "clock technique" is a useful way for one birder to direct others to seemingly hard-to-spot birds. You'd at once know that the imagined clock face was superimposed over the tree and

that the oriole could be found at the outer right edge of the tree.

But the clock technique is only one tool. Many of us also need to polish up our direction-giving. "In top of the bush that's the shape of Ukraine" might seem perfectly clear to you but perhaps not to others.

When giving directions, think about the precise location of the tree, bush, or other supporting feature in question; any outstanding characteristic; how close or far away the bird or vegetation is located; how near to the edge or how deep into the vegetation/water's-edge/or pond the bird

might be; any obvious foreground or background objects that might be useful for orientation; what direction the bird might be moving; and the color or tone of the bark, the branch, the leaves, the water's edge that will help locate the bird.

Locating a bird in the sky — say, a soaring raptor — takes additional practice, involving orienting on other birds in the sky, objects in the foreground (e.g., treelines, towers, buildings), cloud shape, distance, and flight direction.

Then, try to convey the location in the clearest, most sequential order (from general to specific) to guide your companions to seeing the desired bird. At the same time, think about doing it as quickly as possible.

It takes practice at first, but practice makes perfect.

Adapted from the Birding Community E-Bulletin, a free monthly electronic newsletter about birds, birding, and bird conservation news co-edited by Paul Baicich and Wayne Peterson. Visit www.refugenet.org/birding/birding6.html to subscribe.



Birds of Note (April to early July 2011)

Dave Czaplak found a **Least Tern** on the Potomac River upstream of Violette's Lock on 5/18. The bird was observed actively diving for fish and occasionally perched on drifting logs and debris floating downstream in the rain-swollen river. Certainly a rare bird for our county but not completely unexpected. Other *sterna* species sightings of interest include a **Forster's Tern** found by Kathy Calvert at Riley's Lock on 5/4 and a **Common Tern** in the same vicinity a week later on 5/12.



previously mentioned **Least Tern** sighting. Or in Dave's case, make that serendipity plus skill! Dave also spotted five **Black-bellied Plovers** on 6/3 and two **Wilson's Phalaropes** and a single **Laughing Gull** on 6/16.

Continued dredging operations combined with heavy rainfall in early May made for good shorebird habitat at Lake Needwood. Jared Fisher found a **Short-billed Dowitcher** there on 5/15, mixed in with a flock of the more regularly expected migrating shorebirds, including **Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Plovers, and Killdeer.**

A **Mississippi Kite** was observed soaring over and at times perched in dead tree tops at Hughes Hollow beginning on 5/28. The bird was initially reported by Dick Maley. This is not the first time a **Mississippi Kite** has been seen in the county, with at least six or seven reports over the last 20 years. However, this is the first bird that I can remember that's been somewhat "chaseable." Although still a long shot, a few lucky birders have seen the kite in the same vicinity throughout June and into July. Woody and Rae Dubois reported seeing the bird as recently as 7/10.

Woody and Rae Dubois reported a **Snowy Egret** at Riley's Lock on 4/17. Dave Czaplak spotted two **Cattle Egrets** at Homestead Farm along Sugarland Road on 4/22. Possibly as many as four **American Bitterns** were heard at Seneca Creek SP wetlands on 4/25 by Jim Green. A **Least Bittern** was heard at Hughes Hollow on 5/7 and 6/4. Paul Woodward found an immature **Little Blue Heron** at Hughes Hollow on 6/4.

Dave Powell found a vocalizing male **Purple Gallinule** at Hughes Hollow on 5/2. This is first **Purple Gallinule** there since May 2004. The bird stuck around through at least 5/31, often proving easier to hear than see. And who knows? It may still be there as of early July, lurking in the thick marsh vegetation. Other rail species reported from Hughes Hollow include a **Sora** by Daniel Romney on 4/17, two **Virginia Rails** by Bob Augustine on 5/4, and a **Common Moorhen** reported by Phil Davis on 5/6. Jim Moore also reported a rare (for midsummer) **Common Moorhen** at Hughes Hollow on 7/5.

Jared Fisher's quest for a 200 bird Montgomery County year produced some good birds for him during migration, including a **Black-billed Cuckoo** at Brookside Gardens on 4/26, a **Lincoln's Sparrow** along Tucker Lane on 5/8, a **Mourning Warbler** along the Capital Crescent Trail on 5/16, and two **Dunlin** at the Patton Turf Farm on 5/21. As of July 12, Jared has twitched an impressive 209 species in the county this year.

Montgomery has not missed out on this season's Dickcissel invasion. On 6/18, Clive Harris reported a **Dickcissel** singing from a group of three isolated cedar trees in a grassy field off Westerly Road just southwest of Poolesville. As many as three **Dickcissels** were reported from this same location as recently as 7/3. Other grassland birds detected from same vicinity include **Grasshopper** and **Vesper Sparrows** and an **Eastern Meadowlark.**

A calling **Least Flycatcher** on 4/25 made for a good yard list addition for a birder on the west side of Gaithersburg. Gail Mackiernan had a brief but definitive look at an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at Brookside Gardens on 5/2. Jim Stasz found a **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** at Dickerson Conservation Park on 5/19.

Mary Ann Todd found a **Marsh Wren** at Hughes Hollow on 4/22. Daniel Romney noted a **Summer Tanager** at Riley's Lock on 4/25.

Dave Czaplak's persistent, almost daily checks of the bird life along the Potomac River in the vicinity of Violette's and Riley's Locks yielded some great bird finds over the past few months. These sightings included 12 **American Avocets** on 4/16 and a flyby **Neotropic Cormorant** on 5/18. Serendipitously, this occurred on the same day as the

While she was gardening in her Colesville backyard on 4/16, finch-like chatter alerted Gail Mackiernan to the presence of three **Pine Siskins** at her thistle feeder. **Pine Siskins** were also reported in Rockville by Paul O'Brien and in Bethesda by Mike Bowen on 5/2.

—Andy Martin



ABA Presents Chandler Robbins Award to Don Messersmith

The American Birding Association's Board of Directors voted in April to present Dr. Donald Messersmith of Silver Spring, MD, with the 2011 Chandler Robbins Award for Education and Conservation. The award is named after Chandler Robbins, Maryland's foremost living exponent of education and conservation in the world of ornithology and birding. Chan and Don have been friends and colleagues for many years.

Don Messersmith is a retired University of Maryland Professor of Entomology and Ornithology, but "retired" is hardly appropriate. For over 40 years, he has introduced hundreds of people to the joys of birding, and he continues to teach and lead bird walks and tours. Through his infectious enthusiasm for birds, he has been a major force for birding in and beyond the Mid-Atlantic states. A list of his former students reads like a "who's who" of professional ornithologists, biologists, and birders. Some of the names that will be familiar to Maryland and Virginia birders are Don Baugh, Ruth Beck, Dan Boone, Danny Bystrak, Steve Cardano, Barbara Dowell, Sam Droege, Mark Garland, Michael Kreger, Sarah Lockhart, Bill Murphy, Frank Rivera-Milan, Glenn Therres, and the late Kathy Klimkiewicz. The list goes on and on.

Don was one of the pioneers of the now ubiquitous bird tour industry, having for many years been the co-operator of Crowder Nature Tours, long before the current top



Chan Robbins (left) was on hand to congratulate Don Messersmith on his well-deserved award from ABA.

birding tour companies were established. He has led tours to every continent and to over 100 countries. He has made more than a dozen trips to China and served with a World Bank team that advised the Chinese government on areas that needed conservation and protection. He also taught ornithology at Nanjing Normal University in 1987 when on sabbatical from Maryland. Predictably, his students are now important contributors to ornithological knowledge in both China and the United States.

The award was presented to Don at the MOS annual conference in McHenry, MD, on May 21, 2011, with Chandler Robbins in attendance. †

Four Birding Uses for Your iPod Touch or iPhone

Apple Inc.'s mobile iPhone and its phoneless cousin, the iPod Touch, are wonderful gizmos for birders. These combo media players, personal data assistants, wi-fi capable, phone (iPhone only) machines are being used more and more by birders in the field. And a whole bunch of creative birders and companies are producing applications (apps) specifically to aid birders. I currently use my iPod Touch in place of a traditional pocket field guide, to record any mystery or unusual bird songs I might come across in the field, to practice and learn bird songs, and even to keep track of birds seen on an outing.

I originally purchased an iPod Touch (and a portable speaker) for call playback in the field to lure birds in for a better look. This practice, however, has become ethically questionable among birders, and the longer I've owned my iPod Touch, the less I use it for this purpose. David Sibley

has a great discussion about this online at www.sibleyguides.com/2011/04/the-proper-use-of-playback-in-birding.

Turn Your iPod Touch into a Lightweight Super Field Guide

I like to go as lightweight as possible when I'm in the field. The one additional thing I sometimes need, however, is a field guide. Having been birding now for eight years or so, I don't need a field guide on every trip, especially when birding on my home turf here in Montgomery. However, not bringing a field guide seems to put Murphy's Law into overdrive! The times I decide to leave it in the car is just when I need it. Now I no longer have to make this decision. The iPod Touch is so small and lightweight, it just slips into my pocket and I hardly know it's there. And not

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Memories of Bill Dobbins

Our club was saddened to learn of the passing of former MBC member and trip leader, Bill Dobbins, in May of this year. For many years, Bill led spring and fall trips to Rock Creek Park, introducing us to the joys of warbler migration in an urban park setting. Bill will always be remembered for his dry sense of humor, his keen eyes and ears, and his delight in sharing his deep knowledge of bird ID and behavior. For more about Bill, visit www.surfbirds.com/birdingmail/Mail/CarolinaBirds/954593. †



Wallace Kornack:

It is mysterious to me that after several years of not being in touch with Bill Dobbins, I should begin to wonder about the wonderful birding experiences he was having in South Carolina. I got on the web to find out and instead learned that Bill had passed away a month earlier. This sad news caused me to reminisce about birding with him at Rock Creek Park.

When I first birded at Rock Creek some 11 years ago, Bill, two other birders, and I formed a small regular group who birded daily. At the earliest light of dawn, Bill could be found sitting on a log in the Maintenance Yard listening to birdsong. He was so gifted in identifying songs that for him, hearing a warbler was essentially the same as seeing one. He firmly believed that to find birds you must learn their songs, calls, and alarms. One of his favorite and oft-repeated sayings was “For every one bird you see, ten see you.” At one point I suggested that the expression was a Tennessee University motto. We had a good laugh over that.

One of his favorite places to view birds was a small rock ledge at the edge of the ravine in the Rock Creek Maintenance Yard. From that spot he would scan the ravine and call out the warblers he was seeing. When he left Washington, this place became known as “Dobbins’ Rock.” A while back I sent him a note saying I would love to be surprised to see him sitting on that rock once again, but of course that was not to be.

In some ways he was a very private person. While he offered that he was a physician at Georgetown University and that his specialty was gastroenterology, he would go no further than that. I was interested to learn from his obituary that he was an authority on Whipple’s disease, that he had authored three medical textbooks, and that he had been a full professor at several universities. I believe he applied some of the same discipline of investigation and research to his birding avocation, with superb results.

The birding community has lost a great friend and teacher.

Mike Bowen:

Bill Dobbins provided my introductory education to the birding possibilities of the District of Columbia. Although I had worked in DC, just three blocks north of the White House, for more than 30 years, when I retired I realized that my “DC list” was a paltry 81 species, and I thought I ought to try to improve on that number.

I had seen Bill several times when I visited DC sites I was already familiar with, like Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and Theodore Roosevelt Island. Often, when I arrived to start birding, Bill had already finished and was sitting in his little blue car, unconcernedly reading the *Washington Post*. He rose early. When he learned of my desire to bird DC more intensively, he generously offered to accompany me on trips and to acquaint me with the subtleties of DC birding — that the LBJ Grove was entirely in DC, that the entire river off the Alexandria waterfront was actually in the District, and that one-fourth of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, the part closest to the Virginia shore, was in fact in DC, not Virginia! He showed me where the Great Horned Owls nested on TR Island, and he took me to previously unknown places like Fort DuPont, McMillan Reservoir, and Fort Totten.

Today I have 242 species in DC. Every time I contemplate that number, I think of Bill. †

Linda Friedland:

If you arrived at Rock Creek picnic area 17/18 on a May morning waiting for the sun to rise, you could almost bet that Bill Dobbins had already been there for half an hour. Booted up in wellies, his plaid shirt covered with a well-worn sweater to fend off the early morning chill, he would stand quietly until the warblers arrived. Birders would slowly gather around him, knowing Bill would be first on the ID even in the dimmest light.

Because Bill always had so much to tell us about bird ID and behavior, we found ourselves moving at his pace. He was a natural teacher. Club member Ann Lucy remembers

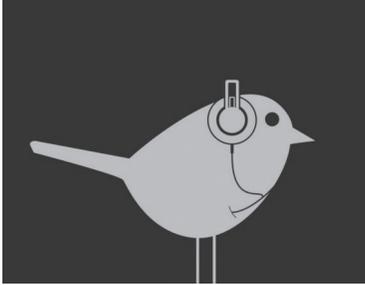


her early birding days: “A long time ago, when I feared to venture any ID, Bill pointed to a flyover and asked what we thought it was. I whispered ‘woodpecker,’ and he said softly to me ‘yes, a Downy.’ He was so quietly kind.”

As MBC field trip chair, I approached him in the early 1990s about leading “urban birding” trips to Rock Creek. He readily agreed, and thus began for many an in-depth education about warblers — and much more.

Bill taught us how to look and how to listen. His mnemonics were so helpful that to this day I can hear him describing the Louisiana Waterthrush song as “come on, come on, come on ... chatter ... chatter.” How fortunate those club members were who were able to spend some spring and fall mornings learning from Bill. †

Four Birding Uses for Your iPod Touch or iPhone



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only do I have a full field guide with me, it's really a field guide-plus because the iPod Touch versions of popular field guides like Sibley or Peterson allow you to listen to bird calls and songs as well.

Sibley not your preferred field guide? Maybe you're a Peterson or National Geographic fan. No worries, because these publishers all have iPod Touch versions of their field guides. As a matter of fact, why not load your iPod Touch with multiple field guides? Even the smallest capacity iPod Touch has plenty of room for more than one. Into butterflies or dragonflies as well as birds? There are field guide apps available for these critters as well.

Use the iPod Touch to Record Bird Sounds

Another cool use for my iPod Touch is recording bird songs in the field. This may be a call I don't recognize or an unusual call from a well-known species. Recordings can also be used to help MOS's MD/DC Records Committee verify a rare bird. While not CD-quality by any stretch, these recordings are usually good enough to bring home, play back on your iPod Touch or download to your home computer, and share with someone to help ID a bird.

Another great use of this feature is to record notes to yourself on species you find in the field. This can be especially

MBC Officers, 2011–2012

These officers were elected at the May meeting.

President — Steve Pretl*

Vice President — Anna Urciolo*

Secretary — Vacant

Treasurer — Sally Wechsler

Chapter Director — Woody Dubois

Chapter Director — Susan Hunt

Chapter Director — Stephanie Lovell*

Chapter Director — Jim Moore*

State Director — Chris Barnard

State Director — John Combs

State Director — Chris Wright*

**Second year of two-year term.*

useful during a bird count or Big Day. When I get home after a day's birding, I simply replay the recordings and enter my sightings in the place where I keep my birding records, Cornell's Lab of Ornithology eBird project.

Hook the iPod Touch Up to Your Car Stereo and Practice Your Birdsong ID Skills

When daily news radio gets a little too depressing, I hook my iPod Touch up to the car stereo through the auxiliary jack and hone my bird song identification skills while driving around on errands. February, March, and early April is a great time to tune up your ears for the coming rush of migrants.

Remote Access to MDOsprey or Other Online Birding Resources

While the iPod Touch can do most everything the iPhone can do, its one disadvantage compared with its phone-equipped cousin is lack of remote Internet access in the field. If keeping up with the latest postings on MDOsprey is important to you when you're out in the field, you may want to choose an iPhone over the iPod Touch. I personally like having an iPod Touch that is separate from my old-fashioned flip phone. But to each their own tech preferences!

Good birding! †

—Andy Martin





MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL



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

- Individual—\$30 (\$10 Chapter/\$20 State)
- Sustaining—\$70 (\$20 Chapter/\$50 State)
- Household—\$40 (\$15 Chapter/\$25 State)
- Life—\$1200 (\$200 Chapter/ \$1000 State)
- Junior—\$6 (\$1 Chapter/\$5 State)
- Associate*— \$8

**member of MOS through another chapter*

- \$ _____ **Dues**
- \$ _____ **Donation to Claudia Wilds Fund**
- \$ _____ **Total enclosed**

New Membership Renewal

Total number of Club members _____
(Household, Sustaining, or Life memberships)

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

NAME(S)

STREET ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

TELEPHONE E-MAIL

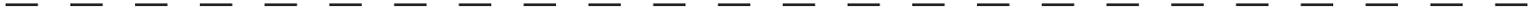
Check if you **DO NOT** want your email address listed on the members-only section of our website.

List your cellphone here if you **DO** want it listed on the members-only section of our website. _____

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

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

Check if you would like to work on a committee.



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

