President’s Chat

I am delighted to be writing my first President’s Chat to welcome you to another year of activities and events for the Montgomery Bird Club. Before I go any further I’d like to acknowledge those who have volunteered their time to help put these events together and keep the club going. The list starts with Ed Patten, who stepped down as President this year and who is now resident in South Carolina. Stephanie Lovell has become Vice President and has put together a great set of speakers for the year. Chris Wright and Rae Dubois are continuing as Treasurer and Secretary respectively.

Andy Martin, Jim Moore and Brooke Smith continue as our State Directors, and Gail Mackiernan, Woody Dubois, Scott Young and Evelyn Ralston are our Chapter Directors. Linda Friedland has again assembled a varied set of field trips, with outings suitable for beginners as well as those seeking to refine their field ID skills. And of course you are reading the Chat, produced every quarter thanks to the hard work of Patrick Newcombe and Gemma Radko. Quite possibly you also downloaded it from the website, ably maintained by Eric Skrzypczak.

The club would not function and survive without volunteers like these. But it won’t survive without members either, and our overall membership has been declining in the last few years as people move away or drop out and they are not replaced in sufficient number by new recruits. For sure, birding clubs don’t serve the same purpose as they did when I first got to know the Chapter, as it was known then, back in the 1990s. We didn’t have eBird, or Facebook groups for birding. Going to chapter meetings and getting to know people was as good a way as any of getting information and networking. That’s not the case these days.

We’re going to be trying one or two different things this year. Firstly, you will be seeing a lot more email communication from us focusing on upcoming meetings and field trips and other parts of the club program. We will also be establishing a Facebook presence. And we also hope to reach out to you all during the year with a survey to hear what you would like to get from the club and to see us doing.

That’s also a plea to renew your membership. You will find the membership form at the back of the Chat. The club is still great value and we hope you will rejoin. More importantly, we hope you will get involved in some of the programs the club does, as well as share with us what you’d like from the club. And we would love more help with organizing what the club does, from leading field trips, helping with the Chat and the website, and other activities.

I hope to see you during the coming year at one of the club meetings, the Social or Picnic, or out in the field. Good birding! 🦃

— Clive Harris
The fall calendar speakers’ list is still tentative, but these are the dates to put on your calendar. Updated information will be emailed to you and included in the November issue of the Chat.

**September 21 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. “Avian Candy in the Pacific Northwest” with Dr. Wayne Bell.** This freelance sojourn to western Washington State took three birders from the snows of Mt. Rainier to Pacific waters off Westernport and the coastal waters of the Olympic Peninsula. In addition to some sweet birdy surprises, they enjoyed an abundance of scenic eye candy. Come along and meet Peale’s Peregrine, Black Oystercatcher, and a view of the Mt. Baker volcano that even the resident species seldom experience.

**October 19 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. Gail Mackiernan on Madagascar.** Gail Mackiernan is a Montgomery Bird Club member who travels widely. Most recently, she authored an article for Birding Magazine on how to find birds on cruises! For this meeting, Gail 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.

**November 16 (Wednesday), 7:30 p.m. “Ospreys on the Patuxent” with Greg Kearns.** Join us to learn about Ospreys, the common “fish hawk” of local rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. Greg’s program will cover Osprey biology on the Patuxent River, nesting platforms, and banding program satellite tracking.

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 Patrick Newcombe at 301-424-3259 or stonecroft5@verizon.net.

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**Meet Your New Vice President: Stephanie Lovell**

Back in the mid-’90s my last child was in high school and I was facing the “empty nest” syndrome. Even though I was working full time, there needed to be something else. So I took a few adult ed courses at the local high school. The only one that stuck was the Birding 101. What a great thing to do! Constantly learning new things, meeting new like-minded people, and travel! What’s not to like. Once you start on this path you begin to understand how Nature works, birds and wildlife depending on trees, flowers and seeds and what happens when we interfere with the process. The miracle of spring migration, especially at Magee Marsh; watching it unfold on radar of all things. It’s so exciting to see old friends: Blackburnian Warblers, Parulas, Black-throated Greens et al and learn their songs.

So over the years I’ve visited many states and a few Central American countries and fortunately Brazil, in search of new birds, new adventures. I found that birders are my tribe and where ever you go there’s going to be a bird club. Which, thanks to Rick Sussman, I found the Montgomery Bird Club shortly after moving here from Connecticut. I’ve enjoyed discovering the state of Maryland and its rich bird life. I’m honored and pleased to be your new Vice President, thank you. ypress

—Stephanie Lovell
Field Trips

New Club members, new birders, and guests are cordially welcome on every field trip. Because some trips offer an easier learning environment, we have marked them with an 🔄. If in doubt, don’t hesitate to contact field trip coordinator Linda Friedland at linnet1@verizon.net or 301-983-2136 (before 9 p.m.).

September 6 (Tuesday) ROCK CREEK PARK, D.C. Urban birding at its best with one of Rock Creek Park’s “Regulars.” This trip is geared to those who may be fairly new to birding but all are welcome. One-third day. Migrant warblers, vireos and sparrows. Meet 6:45 a.m. at Picnic Area 18 (on Ridge Road, ½ mile below Nature Center.) Reservations required. For reservations and directions call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859.

September 7 (Wednesday) WHEATON REGIONAL PARK. Fall is the best time to find migrant warblers, vireos and flycatchers (Yellow-bellied is a good possibility) in this interesting park. Reservations required. Limit: 10. For more information about meeting time and place and for reservations e-mail the LEADERS: Woody and Rae Dubois denguel@verizon.net

September 10 (Saturday) PATUXENT RIVER PARK, JUG BAY NATURAL AREA. Prince George’s Co. Half day. Joint trip with Audubon Naturalist Society. Drift boat on Patuxent River followed by trail walk. Search for Sora, also migrant and resident songbirds and waterbirds. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at park entrance gate. Bring fee of $6 per person for park program; boat trip can be cool and a bit damp. LEADERS: Greg Kearns and John Bjerke. Reservations required (15-person limit). Make reservations with John Bjerke at 240-401-1643 or johnbjerke1@mac.com.

September 11 (Sunday) ROCK CREEK PARK FOR BEGINNERS. One-third day. The focus will be on identifying migrant warblers, vireos and sparrows but we’ll also look closely at more common birds. Meet at 6:45 am at Picnic Area 18 (on Ridge Rd, ½ mile below the nature center) (Note the early meeting time necessary to secure a parking spot.) Reservations required. For reservations and directions call the LEADER: Wallace Kornack, 202-338-7859

September 17 (Saturday) SNICKERS GAP HAWKWATCH (between Bluemont & Berryville, VA) Two-thirds day. Joint trip with Audubon Naturalist Society. Peak time for Broad-winged Hawks. Meet at 10 a.m. at commuter parking lot at VA 7 and VA 601. Make reservations (required) with LEADERS: Joan Boudreau and Bob Abrams at icepeep@aol.com or 703-734-1238 (home). Bring tripods, scopes, chairs, pack lunch, and rain/wind gear. Call leaders for directions.

September 25 (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 the Violette’s Lock parking lot, end of Violette’s Lock Road. We will then carpool to Pennyfield Lock and walk back up the C&O Canal towpath to Violette’s Lock. This walk should net an interesting mix of late warblers, other land bird migrants, and probably a few early winter visitors, as we scan the skies and river for raptors and waterbirds. Limit: 12. To sign up, contact LEADER: Jim Nelson, kingfishers2@verizon.net or 240-515-4517.

October 2 (Sunday) LITTLE BENNETT REGIONAL PARK FOR BEGINNERS. All are welcome on this half day trip but we especially encourage those new to birding to join us. Meet at 7:30 a.m. We’ll slowly walk some of the woodland trails looking for migrant and resident birds. Reservations required. Limit: 8. For reservations and directions contact the LEADER: Gemma Radko 301-514-2894

continued next page
October 9 (Sunday) MONTGOMERY’S BIG SIT! The object of a Big Sit is to tally as many bird species as can be seen or heard within 24 hours from a single spot having a 17 foot diameter. Our club has picked a good place for a day of bird watching and over the years has tallied more than 50 species. Join Montgomery County’s Sitting Ducks at the dike across the road from the Black Hill RP boat ramp. We’ll start at dawn and continue until we run out of steam. Come for the day or just an hour or two. New birders and new members encouraged! For more information or directions contact the LEADER: Linda Friedland linnet1@verizon.net

October 19 (Wednesday) BLUE MASH FOR NEW BIRDERS. Join us for the morning as we learn and review some of the basics of bird ID. Blue Mash is a great place to find our more common species as well as some of the harder to ID sparrows. This trip is primarily for new birders/new members but all are welcome. Meet at the parking lot off Zion Road at 9 a.m. For information and reservations contact the LEADER: Stephanie Lovell amoreallovell@gmail.com.


October 30 (Sunday) LOIS Y. GREEN PARK: Remembering Lou. Our annual morning walk in honor of former MBC president and all round naturalist Lou DeMouy who passed away in the fall of 2012. This year the trip will be geared to beginning birders and new members but all are welcome. Meet at 7:30 a.m. Reservations required. For more information, directions and reservations contact the LEADER: Andy Martin at martinap2@verizon.net or 301-529-2066

November 5 (Saturday) 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 leader for reservations and more information. LEADER: Mark England 240 207-3132 (home) or 240 375-4500 (cell)

MBC Annual Picnic

On the afternoon of June 4th, the Montgomery Bird Club held our second ever annual picnic at Black Hills Regional Park. Although the turnout was not as high as last year, the birders that assembled enjoyed some great food and conversation at a very pleasant and secluded picnic shelter before heading down to the boat ramp for some birding before dusk. We saw 21 species in total, not bad for less than an hour. This included an Eastern Towhee doing a Carolina Wren imitation, which fooled everybody, as well as nice views of a Green Heron catching fish in the marsh.

—Clive Harris
Blue Mash Nature Trail and adjacent Oaks Landfill (closed), April 23. Leader: Mark England. Participants: 12. Weather: Wet! We started at Blue Mash, but only got to the end of the gravel road before the clouds burst and we retreated to our cars. We decided to go directly to the nearby Oaks Landfill and do some car birding, hoping the rain would eventually stop, but it never really did till about noon. Despite the steady rain, our hardy group saw some nice birds, particularly at the landfill. As we drove toward the large pond, we saw two Wild Turkeys in the landfill brush, then watched them fly across the pond to Blue Mash. In the pond we saw Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Ducks, Solitary Sandpiper, and Greater Yellowlegs. In one of the leachate ponds visible only inside the landfill we had a female Bufflehead, three Blue-winged Teal, and a Spotted Sandpiper, seen by some. At the top of the landfill, we had about eight Savannah Sparrows feeding in the road. Surprisingly, we had no raptors at the landfill (where there is almost always something), but I attributed it to the inclement weather. When the skies finally cleared a little around noon, a few of us well-soaked diehards went back to Blue Mash and picked up a few other species, including Prairie Warbler, Pine Warbler, immature White-crowned Sparrow, and a Red-shouldered Hawk, our only raptor for the day. Total species seen was 41, but there was a probable Rose-breasted Grosbeak that got away before a positive identification could be made.

Occoquan Bay NWR, May 1. Leaders: Gerry Hawkins and Mike Bowen. Participants: 5. Species: 65. Three hardy persons joined the leaders on a field trip to Occoquan Bay NWR in Woodbridge, VA. Persistent rain kept some potential participants dry by staying home, but despite the damp and gloom the trip had lots of species and lots of highlights. As usual on this trip, we had nice views of Prairie and Yellow Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, Prothonotary Warblers, and Yellow-breasted Chats, all breeders at the refuge, but the best of our 12 species of warblers was a singing Canada Warbler at eye level that does not breed there. Orchard Orioles were prominent singers all over the refuge, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Swallows and Swifts were also numerous and ever-present. We had 8 Ospreys and “only” one Bald Eagle. One Horned Grebe, one Wood Duck and 11 Ruddy Ducks rounded out the waterfowl. No rails this year, though. Next year we hope for better weather and even more warblers!

Birding by Ear, Hughes Hollow, May 6. Leader: Paul Woodward. Despite the threat of rain 5 people showed up for the walk. Fortunately, the heavy rain held off until the trip was over. We walked around the impoundments and since migration had been delayed because of the recent cold and wet weather we weren’t overwhelmed by singing birds. Instead, we could concentrate on the local nesters such as White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Prothonotary Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Pine Warbler, Indigo Bunting, and Orchard Oriole and the few migrants present (Northern Waterthrush, Black-throated Blue Warbler and Myrtle Warbler). Other calls of interest were Pied-billed Grebe from the marsh and the flight call of female Hooded Mergansers. Of the 40 or so species we recorded the best birds were American Coot, Solitary Sandpiper, a singing Marsh Wren, and a Swamp Sparrow.

Rock Creek Park, May 3. Leader: Wallace Kornack. Due to overcast conditions we decided to move from the Ridge to the Maintenance Yard. On the way one of the tour members spotted an early Yellow Warbler and a Baltimore Oriole. In the Maintenance Yard, we enjoyed hearing calls from an Ovenbird and Wood Thrush while searching and finding several Yellow-rumped Warblers and a Chestnut-sided Warbler. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks called and eventually a female and a brightly colored male came into view. At the Nature Center, we heard and saw Black-and-white, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped warblers as well as a Northern Parula and Eastern Kingbird. We then proceeded to the Dog Run where we spotted a Scarlet Tanager and a Common Loon flying over. To complete the tour, we returned to the Ridge where other birders reported seeing numerous warblers. At the Ridge, we added Black-throated Blue, Blue-winged, Yellow-rumped warblers and heard a Blackpoll Warbler and an Ovenbird.

Izaak Walton League, B-CC Chapter, Conservation Farm, May 8. Leader: Jim Nelson. Participants: 9. Weather: Lovely sunny morning after days of rain, temperature in the 50’s and 60’s. Once again, thanks to Club member Jim Tate, our group enjoyed access to this prime private property near Poolesville with a great mix continued next page
Youth Backpack Recipient

Every year the Montgomery Bird Club receives a youth backpack from the Maryland Ornithological Society to give to a promising young birder. Owen Crise was this year’s recipient of the youth backpack at the April meeting of the Bird Club. Owen is in tenth grade at the Maret School.

Stalking a Pileated Woodpecker: A First Attempt at Tracking a Bird

It was a Saturday afternoon in early winter and I was feeling cooped-up with the onset of the cold weather and the first snows of the season. I was eight years old at the time, and to pass the afternoon I was staring out the kitchen window at our bird feeder. All of a sudden, the normal stream of blue jays, cardinals, chickadees and “little brown birds” was scattered by the arrival of a big, black and white bird. At the time, the only big black and white bird that I knew was an eagle, but the red head on this bird made it clear this wasn’t an eagle. I quickly grabbed the bird field guide and after a little searching made the identification: It was Pileated Woodpecker.

After researching the bird, I felt confident that I could track it down to get a better look at it. I made plans to go hiking the next day through the neighboring woods that flank our town (Washington Grove, Maryland) to look for the bird. I suggested to my Dad that we spend a couple hours outside in the cold, so in planning our hike we decided bring along a camp stove, cooking gear, and dehydrated soup so we could have a warm lunch on the trail. In addition, we packed our binoculars and field guide.

We started cooking and the stove was making a deafening roar of burning butane as the water was heating. All the sudden, above the sound of the stove, I could hear a distinctive bird call: “Wuk, wuk, wuk, wuk-aaak!” accompanied by the unmistakable drumming of a woodpecker. My head snapped towards the sound. I grabbed my binoculars and ran towards it, which immediately scared off the bird. Disappointed, I returned to our lunch site and, as I took my first sip of soup, the Pileated Woodpecker flew down toward the ground from out of the canopy, passing right by us, and perched on a dead oak tree close by. The bird started hopping up and down a branch drilling for frozen insects, with a shower of wood chips falling to the ground. Its red head could easily be spotted in the drab winter canopy of trees. The bird seemed oblivious to us as we took turns inspecting it at close range through our binoculars. After a few minutes it flew away, in its distinctive loping flight pattern.

From this experience, I realized that birding could be a very active pursuit, more than just sitting at the kitchen table looking out the window. Since that winter day in 2008, I have been on many bird walks and have incorporated birding into all my outdoor activities. ¶

—Owen Crise
Birds of Note (April through June 2016)

The bird topping this issue’s “Birds of Note” is Jared Fisher’s Seaside Sparrow, a first Montgomery County record. Jared was birding Ken-Gar Palisades Park on May 26th when he noticed faint calls coming from the marsh. When the sparrow came out into the open, he quickly realized the rarity of the bird and spread the word to Maryland’s birders. This sparrow only stayed in the small marsh for a couple of days before leaving, but despite its skulky habits and brief stay, many birders were patient enough to see this rare sparrow. While waiting for the sparrow, many birders also got a look at the Virginia Rail that Jared Fisher found on May 27th.

A few interesting waterbirds were found this spring. On May 5th, Dave Czaplak and Mary Ann Todd found an Eared Grebe in breeding plumage at Little Seneca Lake in Black Hill Regional Park. A nearby Horned Grebe, also in breeding plumage, provided an excellent comparison very rarely found in Montgomery County. Dave Czaplak found a Greater Scaup, a species usually gone by April, on June 5th at Violette’s Lock. Dave Czaplak found another late duck, a Long-tailed Duck, at Violette’s Lock on June 16th. Snowy Egrets were found along the Potomac River and interestingly, a bird was found at Crabbs Branch Pond by Evie Shen-Tal and Mike Ostrowski.

Ryan Fick spotted a Mississippi Kite gliding over Ken-Gar Palisades Park on May 30th. On May 7th, Scott Young spied two Sandhill Cranes flying over his backyard. What a great yard bird! Later in the month, Anna Urciolo found a Sandhill Crane on Beallsville Road on May 29th. This bird stuck around for that afternoon, but a few other birders were able to enjoy it.

A variety of shorebirds were found in the county this spring. At Mile 29 along the Potomac River, Mary Ann Todd and Dave Czaplak had a trio of Dunlin, a rare spring migrant, mixed in with Semipalated Plovers and Sandpipers. Dave Czaplak saw another rare migrant, a Black-bellied Plover, at Violette’s Lock on June 3rd. Linda Friedland saw a Pectoral Sandpiper on April 25th at Pennyfield Lock. David Roberts had another at Hughes Hollow on April 30th.

This spring was good for gulls and terns along the Potomac River. One of the best is definitely the Least Tern spotted on June 28th by Dave Czaplak and Mary Ann Todd. A Maryland Ornithological Society field trip to Hughes Hollow led by Paul and Joan Woodward found another Marsh Wren on May 6th.

At Hughes Hollow, Mike Ostrowski found a pair of Alder Flycatchers on May 15th. These birds stayed for 10 days and were enjoyed by many. Gerry Hawkins, Mike Bowen and Robert Winter found another Alder Flycatcher at Hughes Road Polo Fields on May 19th. On May 12th, Dave Czaplak and Mary Ann Todd found the only Olive-sided Flycatcher of this spring at Violette’s Lock. Clive Harris found a Sedge Wren at Pennyfield Lock on May 7th. On May 1st, David Roberts found a Marsh Wren at Pennyfield Lock. A Maryland Ornithological Society field trip to Hughes Hollow led by Paul and Joan Woodward found another Marsh Wren on May 6th.

On May 5th, Mary Ann Todd had a good day, with both a Cerulean and a Golden-winged Warbler at Violette’s Lock. On May 3rd, Michael O’Brien also found a Cerulean Warbler at Upper Watts Branch Park. An apparent Lawrence’s Warbler, a Golden-winged x Blue-winged Hybrid, was found by Matt Cohen on May 4th in his yard. Mourning Warblers were seen in a few locations along the Potomac River. Seth Factor found a Mourning Warbler at Violette’s Lock on May 8th. David Roberts found another at Pennyfield Lock on May 11th. Kathy Calvert found one at Hughes Hollow on May 17th. There were a good amount of Summer Tanagers in the county this year. Many people saw them near Pennyfield Lock and Blockhouse Point Conservation Park. Dave Czaplak found a Dickcissel on Hughes Road on June 1st. Two were also heard the next day. —Kevin Ebert
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL 2016/17

I/we wish to join the Montgomery Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society, for the year beginning September 2016 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
$_________ Additional Donation to MOS
$_________ 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:
Helen Patton, 429 Hamilton Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20901

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 receive the Chat by mail. Otherwise, you will be notified 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.